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LITTLE COQUETTE

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LITTLE COQUETTE

The Story of a French Girlhood

By

RENÉE DE FONTARCE McCORMICK

Translated by

LEANDER J. McCORMICK

Decorations by Susanne Suba



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To Marie-Blanche and Thierry

*and in homage to the City of Chicago,
where I had the pleasure of living while
writing this book.*

FOREWORD

Simone d'Entremont is a little girl such as once I was. My life was like hers, and it was passed at a time and in circumstances such as I have here described. .

The people, the places, the events of which I tell are in essence true, but the details are drawn from many sources; hence the characters of the book and the correlation of events are really fictional.

Renée de Fontarce McCormick

Chicago, 1944

LITTLE COQUETTE

PART ONE



Com-me la plume au vent, fem-me va - rie sou-vent

Memory is a poet, not a historian

ALWAYS I have read with delight the intimate autobiographies of famous people. They have lived, loved, laughed, and lied, dripping their sentiments and adventures in black serpentine from the ends of their pen points, with the intention of displaying to advantage their complicated egos. In my case, I am only a simple woman, but just the same many things occur in the life and heart of such a one, and since I have constantly been informed that I talk too much about myself, I will now take this opportunity to tell what happened to me.

I was born on the thirty-first of July, 1899, in the plain of Senlis, and am thus a child of two centuries. I was given seven names in honour of my grandmothers, of close relatives, of two uncles, and of the Virgin Mary. My father, Maxence d'Entremont, had bought five years before a small white château—resembling a wedding cake in architecture—called “La Borne Blanche”. The building had been constructed in about 1840, and was adorned with pointed roofs, as are many houses in that region. In fact this style originates, no doubt, from the ancient castle of Chantilly with its embellishments, undertaken by the Dukes d'Aumale at so many different periods.

Though my parents had been married five years, I was the first child. It is said that when a girl is born, all the walls weep, but this was not so with me, since my birth was an important circumstance in my family, and one of interest in the ‘high society’ which extended from Paris through all the Provinces of France. It may appear pretentious to consider the event noteworthy, but in those days this large universe of ours was obviously smaller, and the minuscule details in the life of every member of the social set was a consequential matter. People of prominence travelled little, and when they did it was only to visit with others of a group, each knowing who every ‘worthwhile’ individual was, at least by name, from one end of Europe to the other. Trains, cars, and planes have driven those recluses from their privacy; no longer can they pull up the drawbridge and barricade themselves in their fortresses.

Of the room where I was born, my recollection is keen, since it changed in no manner until father sold the property when I was nine years old. The wide bed was covered with a royal blue canopy from which hung heavy damask curtains of a similar colour embroidered with gold fleurs-de-lis. The oak furniture carved with Renaissance designs gave a solid and comfortable effect, though it lacked grace. Next door in a large bathroom—the only one in the house—father had himself shaved each morning in great pomp by Père Laflûte, the village barber. Together they held endless conversation, since Laflûte was the best-informed person concerning the slightest scandals in every château of the region. My first recollections are how I would come down early to say good morning to my parents. I would find mother still in bed, without cream on her face or curl-papers in her hair. I would receive a hasty kiss, and would be told even more quickly to be off. Mother exclaimed, “Go on, my daughter, Père Laflûte, has left,” and I would hear, as I climbed the staircase, long bursts of laughter which made me laugh too, like a small muted echo.

The interior of the château was furnished somewhat sumptuously in a style that traversed almost every period and terminated at last in the reign of Louis Philippe. In the great entrance hall, adorned with tapestries on the walls, there were the usual pieces of furniture—velvet-covered footstools, Renaissance occasional tables, and in particular the inevitable carved-wood chests that are found in every such household. Along the fluted wainscoting in serried ranks were nailed the mounted feet of stags and boars, dedicated to mother by the masters of various hunts.

The impressive wooden staircase—regretting, I suppose, that it was not of stone—rose from the left end of the hall to the second floor. On the same side was located father’s inviolable study, decorated in white-painted woodwork, draped in red plush, with easy-chairs upholstered in the same material, and containing also a huge desk such as a successful attorney might install in his office. It was squeezed somehow between two long French windows. The monotony of the plush walls was relieved by English prints, by framed photographs of horses, as well as of royal personages who had graciously signed themselves, ‘Affectionately yours’.

Father had succeeded in retaining but few hairs on his head. They formed a distinguished little circlet or halo, which, except for a parting at the back, managed to link his two temples together. The last hairs on his crown had left him when he was twenty-five, 'owing to the excess of my amiable virtues'—so he professed. In order to replace them and to protect himself from draughts, he wore at all times a sponge-bag check cap which arrived new, without fail, every January from Lock's, of London; for in my family things always took place regularly, if possible, and always in strict rotation annually on the same dates. Father had a large round head that was chiefly remarkable on account of his prominent brow. Beneath this dome-like projection the other features were small, regular, and not particularly noticeable. His neck was so short that there seemed to be none at all, but to make up for this he wore a high stiff collar which held him in a vice, so that it was necessary to turn his whole body to look to one side or the other. He had wide shoulders and a deep barrel-chest denoting his great strength. If not so fat, his figure might have been much admired, as he had no hips and long tapering legs, that were slightly bowed, however, from a constant life on horseback. When in the house papa spent most of his time in the study, huddled in one of the four English armchairs surrounding the fireplace. He sat there interminably, smoking a cigar and completely absorbed in a modern novel.

I always adored my father—a charming person—weak, but jovial. Though not possessing deep intelligence, he had extraordinarily good common sense. When not in the study with his novels, the *Gotha*, or *Tout-Paris*, he employed his leisure in sketching horses. It was a brilliant talent, exercised only for his own entertainment or to distract himself from boredom. Then he used to stroll in the park, saluting with due deference the thousand-franc notes mother had spent for such green English lawns, and for those extravagant roses she had been unable to deny herself. Her love of gardens had actually necessitated five gardeners, a number which in France, even in those times, appeared an astonishing luxury. But outdoors father was usually on horseback; in fact half his life was spent with horses, one quarter with women, and one quarter in sleep.

Returning now to the interior of the house: giving off the hall there were two drawing-rooms, both of them painted white, and draped with beige satin curtains on which were embroidered bouquets of pink flowers. Owing to numerous doors and windows opening on a wide terrace, the tone of the large drawing-room appeared rather more beige than white. Our chairs were pure Louis XVI, and were upholstered with the same satin as the curtains, while their framework was painted in Ripolin enamel. The carpets were Aubusson, decorated with flowered garlands. Along the walls hung ancestral portraits, highly varnished and recently restored. On the marble mantelpiece an enormous Louis XIV clock of bronze and tortoise-shell kept an accurate count of the hours. Here and there flowers in engraved red vases shed their petals delicately. Wherever there was suitable space, the swords of gallant ancestors were stacked pell-mell behind the glazed panels of rosewood cabinets; then there was a great quantity of pretentious but valuable Dresden china, and, finally, an incalculable number of miniatures on ivory. These last consisted of grandmothers, beautiful as angels, and grandfathers in uniforms resplendent with gold braid. Each of these miniatures bore the name, the dates of birth and death, and the residence of the subject. I knew them all by heart. One of the ladies looked like me. She had the face of a peasant among all those other pompous persons. I did not care for that lady, of whom mother used to remark, "See how much my daughter resembles her." Besides all these ancestral souvenirs, every vacant table or shelf was loaded down with gold vanity boxes; antique parchments; books in manuscript, dating from the days before printing; and, to tell the truth, every other kind of bric-à-brac one sees in the houses of ancient French families.

Fortunately, mother had a fine feeling for old things and our home contained no examples of the bad taste of that period. Never during my youth did I live surrounded by the "Pullman" style favoured elsewhere in those days.

The dining-room was very large, after the fashion of such châteaux, with a great round table in the centre. I remember this dining-room as a sort of mysterious sanctuary for the grown-ups, where I played but a small rôle, having only been admitted to its rites at the age of seven. Tremendous goings-on

took place in that room, I must say. My parents used to give hunt breakfasts there during the winter, and all through the year a series of formal dinners—every three months or so—in honour of various princes. Each was a colossal affair. In the morning a whole battalion of waiters would arrive from Rebattet, the Parisian caterer. With them came a chef, and great stores of pâtés from Chabrier, of foie gras, of pheasants if in season, not to speak of rare flowers, even orchids in winter to decorate the table.

Adrien, our butler, the footman, and the second man wore, of course, our livery with the family arms on their brass buttons. Tata, our cook, driven from her stove by the imported chef, went off to play *manille* with Mathilde, the concierge. I did not blame her, since Tata was a great *cordon bleu* and she was furious. "I would never lend a helping hand to that chef," she exclaimed, "a man who is supposed to know more about cooking than I, no, indeed!"

Tata, a typical Burgundian, quarrelsome and raucously loud-mouthed, was born near Entremont. At sixteen years of age she was engaged, as fifth chambermaid, in the household of Grandmother Blanche d'Entremont, who she said used to insist in those days that Tata make use of the cracked chamber-pots in which to wash her face, so as to save the cost of a new wash-basin. It is clear that my grandmother was distinctly economical. When father married, he was followed by Tata in the capacity of cook. She ruled the servants' hall with an iron hand, scorning to conceal it beneath a velvet glove. She feared no one in the world, except mother, of whom she had a holy dread. In the midst of one of her more violent tempers, if the shadow of her mistress appeared, Tata, in a fright, would flee silently away. Excusing her terror to me on one such occasion, she explained, "You know, a pussy-cat is a lion to a mouse." To sum up, she was stubborn and hard, she loved wine and could cook ravishly. I doubt if she had ever heard of rest on the Sabbath. Sitting in the kitchen—her land of dreams—she would try out a new recipe, would work over her accounts, or spell out to herself the cheapest kind of novels. But she was the one who knew everything that took place throughout the house, and in this we were rivals, for when Miss Hayes, my old English

governess, was gently snoring, I used to steal away on tiptoe so as to eavesdrop on whatever occurred from cellar to garret.

Often I would surprise Tata with her ear at a keyhole; then I would ask her, "What's happening?"

She would signal to me, "Hush, I will tell you."

We would then climb to the top floor and sit on the staircase where she repeated to me what she knew of the great and mysterious personages of the *château*.

"Now I have told you everything, don't go and repeat it to your 'English'," she would warn, and I never repeated a word. I must admit that though Tata and I were arch-conspirators—sworn to inviolable mutual secrets—my bond with her was not sufficiently strong to give me the right of entrance to her kitchen. That was a sanctuary into which I was forbidden to penetrate. I would only meet her on the neutral ground of the service pantry, and never throughout my childhood could I see for myself what went on in her holy of holies.

The dining-room represented for me a place containing bright lights, crystal ware, cakes and champagne. Adrien was in charge there. He was also an old servant, having been many years with father, and was the husband of Tata. The other servants changed rarely—not on account of my parents, but always through trouble with the Adrien family, those tyrannical guardians of the house.

In addition to the great princely dinners given in honour of some royal duke or for one or other of several Bourbon and Orleans princes together with those persons deemed worthy to accompany them, my parents also entertained their Parisian friends, particularly those connected with the cavalry, to which father belonged. It was the custom in France, as in England, if a man were well-born, to make the cavalry his career; and father had followed the custom, though he had resigned with a great flourish at the time when the possessions of the Church had been confiscated by the State. Hussars and dragoons used to fill our house with the clank of sabres, and the clink of spurs, for Senlis was a garrison town. They would appear at breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and they have left me with wonderful recollections of men in pale blue and scarlet uniforms, their helmets adorned with horses' tails. These men wore long moustaches and sported

monocles. They discussed horses or the gossip of the region, and, as royalists, never failed to denounce the "abominable Third Republic". A hussar cured me of the habit of biting my fingernails. One of them had remarked to mother that I was the prettiest little girl he had ever seen; but she replied, "It cannot be so, since she bites her nails." "Oh," said the officer, "I feared as much, because she smells very badly." In a fury, I started to howl. Though only five years old, I could already feel the anguish of wounded vanity.

In the spring, each year my parents held a kind of horse show, known as a "Ralley-paper" in one of our fields. It was a curious affair, though not unusual in those times. In the field long tables were laid with fine tablecloths on which reposed bottles of champagne in ice buckets, candelabras, silverware, plates, and dishes. The contestants, having completed a cross-country race, were supposed to jump over the tables on horseback, one after the other, without disturbing or breaking anything. Afterwards prizes were distributed and everyone feasted. At night the carriages, which had come from all parts of the countryside for the event, with men in smart liveries on the boxes, with gleaming harness and well-groomed horses, would depart very late by the light of lanterns and torches.

I was permitted to be present at these doings, accompanied by Miss Hayes, who remained with me for ten years. She was a dear, plump old spinster, nearing her fifties, and was beloved by all, even including Tata. Sometimes in the winter evenings when we had retired to our rooms on the top floor, we would have a party to which Tata was invited. Miss Hayes and I were garbed similarly in long white nightgowns embroidered at the neck and wrists. On our heads were veritable brown snails, fat Burgundy snails—of hair—in curl-papers. Behind locked doors Miss Hayes brewed for us with much fervour on these occasions a punch, a good English rum punch, over which Tata would smack her lips with satisfaction. In my case, the small sips I was permitted would send me to sleep with rose-coloured dreams.

When I was very young I had a German governess. She was discharged within the hour when she gave me a too vigorous slap that produced a violent nosebleed before the very eyes of Tata, who as watchdog allowed nothing to escape her. My

Englishwoman never left me to myself, she spent her time either trying without success to teach me something, or else at the everlasting jobs of changing my clothes and binding my hair on wooden curling-sticks—a process designed, I imagine, to give me that artificial appearance of a round and rosy doll I saw reflected in all my childhood photographs.

At the age of six I suddenly received no less than a hundred and ten dresses, purchased for me all at the same time by mother, in an access of maternal solicitude. I had to continue wearing them until I was ten years old. They were constantly being lengthened, or strips of English lace would be pieced on at the extremities as I grew. It was necessary to recover the outlay on those detested dresses. I shall never forget them, for they were always the same, and they gave the impression either that they had shrunk in the wash or that I had grown too fat; but worst of all, and this upset me the more, they looked old-fashioned. Other childhood troubles were induced by those horrible high shoes which climbed so far up my legs, with the purpose in theory of giving me slender ankles later. Then there was also the question of the felt gaiters which pricked my calves mercilessly in the winter time. As a matter of fact, everything was uncomfortable or prickly during my youth: the long woollen underwear, the thick knitted stockings, the flannels that kept me too warm, the heavily starched linens that enclosed my protesting body; all these were scarcely bearable and induced in me a continual state of rebellion. At the same time there were the never-ending cries, "Don't dirty yourself. You're going to get dirty. Don't dirty yourself. The doorbell is ringing, guests are arriving." Then there was the formal summons to the drawing-room where I had to pass in review before strangers.

Mother spent a great part of her life in the small drawing-room at La Borne Blanche. I remember her generally in a long, pearl-grey tailored suit cut by Creed. Beneath the jacket she wore a white blouse with an attached collar enclosing her neck tightly. There she sat, working on a piece of silk tapestry covered with strange warlike animals that were obviously in great anger. At other times she would be in an evening gown made for her by a dressmaker in Chantilly. It was frequently a



pale blue tulle affair, of diaphanous elegance. Before each of her new creations Miss Hayes and I would stand with our mouths open in admiration. At night, when I snuggled in my bed while outside the wind screamed with wolfish howls, after I had said my prayers and thanked *le bon Dieu* for my daily bread and butter—not to speak of a little taste of punch—I would fall asleep imagining in my dreams that I saw mother flashing through the sky, like a falling star, with an enigmatic smile on her lips. To me she was not mortal then, but surely a being escaped from my book of fairy tales, by Perrault, which I treasured so dearly.

Mother was quite tall, I should say about five feet six inches in height. She had thin legs with no hips to speak of, and though in the back she showed hardly any curves, she displayed a rather generous bust. It occurs to me that she scarcely possessed an admired figure according to the popular ideas of the period, and for that reason, no doubt in order to give the desired effect of a feather bed tied in the middle, she sought to gain weight, stuffing herself with great quantities of sardines in oil. Her long black hair curled naturally, and set off attractively a pale, almost olive complexion in the midst of which shone the deep periwinkle blue of her seductive eyes. At a time when “glamour” hardly existed she was almost glamorous. She had no illusions, and was frankly infatuated with herself. In her opinion she was far superior intellectually to those with whom necessity constrained her to associate. Children did not interest her at all. “What are governesses for?” she would remark when on that subject. Children should appear for inspection twice a day she thought, so that one could be certain they were pink and healthy. Apart from that, they seemed desirable to her as things to be shown off, like the horses and the château. They were an adjunct to go with the name, the title, and the prevailing English atmosphere of the place.

In principle mother paid no attention at all to managing the house. It was supposed to be under the direction of Brigitte, who had a position as governess-secretary. She was an angelic creature, gay and kindly. From the birth of my brother she became a sort of mother to him in addition to her other work. But her duties were not really arduous, since, in spite of a seem-

ing superficial indifference, it was in fact mother who had her eye on everything.

"Tell the gardener to bring some fresh flowers. Empty the ash-trays, the smell of cigar butts makes me ill. I saw a spider's web on the second floor. Adrien, the footman has a hole in his glove. I believe there are rats in the garret." Such remarks, uttered by mother in a phlegmatic manner that was not to be gainsaid, kept the place running smoothly. She had a rather mysterious bearing, acquired together with an accompanying reserve in the course of her austere Protestant upbringing. Though fond of society, of music, and of riding to hounds, she had conservative ideas in some directions, while in others she was extremely broad-minded. She believed in doing "what was being done."

"Let us make as small a scandal as possible" was her guiding principle. She had probably been more or less unhappy at being transplanted when already grown-up from the strict Protestantism of her grandmother's home into the Catholic surroundings of Touraine and Ile-de-France. Her father, Antoine Montigny, lived in Indre-et-Loire where he owned an estate. He was the oldest son of a long line of weavers, who had during four hundred years supervised with success their weaving and cordage business along the banks of the Loire. At twenty he had been sent to Paris to finish his studies, and while there belonged to that class known as *les grands bourgeois* who were related by marriage or otherwise to the provincial aristocracy. His sister Amélie had lately married Monsieur de Sizy, a gentleman belonging to an excellent family. In Paris my grandfather met the high society of the Second Empire, and was introduced to the court of Louis Napoleon and his beautiful Empress. The imperial couple was attempting just then to unite the Empire, the high *bourgeoisie*, and the nobility through a series of brilliant receptions at which the ladies waltzed daringly in crinolines.

On the death of his father, in about 1860, Antoine Montigny married a rich young lady, the daughter of a champagne merchant, named Ackerman. She died two years later. Distressed by this sad event and spoiled as he was by a too easy life, he began to live extravagantly. He was admitted to the elegant

society of "The Lions" and became a member of the *Épatant* Club where he played for high stakes while no doubt stroking nonchalantly his little square beard, with its neat parting down the middle. In a few years he had gambled so heavily and with so little luck that he was completely ruined.

At the battle of the Loire, in that tragic year of 1871, grandfather was wounded in the leg. During his convalescence at Saumur he met grandmother, Jeanne Fréteval, the daughter of a Protestant banker who, in spite of the disastrous events of that period, had managed to preserve a respectable fortune in England. Grandfather, perhaps because he was naturally shrewd, hastened to woo her. He was a charming and perfect man of the world, an excellent shot, and a good dancer, but he had never made a penny in his life. He had known, however, all the women of his time from ladies of the court to the dancers of the *Bals Musette*, not to speak of girls in the theatre. Thanks to all these beauties, and to his gambling, there remained of his fortune "only a sideboard and a silver spoon," as he admitted.

The moment she set eyes on Antoine, Jeanne fell madly in love, and after changing her religion married him forthwith. It brought down on her the maledictions of her father, but it did not cause her to lose any sleep, since he had settled a splendid allowance on her for life and had to pay it, whether the year was good or bad, whether he approved or not.

In a small château of Touraine she brought a daughter into the world who was named Antoinette and who became my mother. When mother's seventh birthday arrived, her grandfather, Monsieur Fréteval, concluded it was time to reconcile himself with his daughter Jeanne. She was invited with her family to his mansion in the rue François I for a great dinner to celebrate the return of the prodigal child and the anniversary of her Catholic offspring. In the midst of the feast the old gentleman got up to offer a toast to his daughter and grandchild, and promptly fell down stone dead. It was discovered that he had left a fine fortune of about eleven million gold francs to be divided between his wife and his two daughters. Jeanne Montigny thereupon decided to return to Paris for six months of the year. She rented an apartment in the rue de

Courcelles, and engaged Mademoiselle Agathe, a lady of whom mother always spoke with loving devotion, as governess.

Finding that she was lonely, the widowed Madame Fréteval demanded the company of her granddaughter, Antoinette, and the governess; taking them with her on frequent trips to Naples, where she was born, and where she still had numerous cousins scattered through the villas of Capo-di-Monte. Later they went to Switzerland and to England, where there were still other relatives. Finally these three continued permanently together and firmly united. Jeanne in exchange for the loss of her child received presents: a château with the surrounding farms, horses with carriages, other horses for riding to hounds, rare trees for the park, and even pheasants to gratify the sporting tastes of her husband.

So it happened that mother was in fact brought up completely by Madame Fréteval and the governess, both of whom adored her and watched over her curly head with a passionate devotion. She accompanied them on every trip, and thus was invited to countless parties with various little Protestant girls. Though she went every Sunday to attend the Mass of Saint-Honoré d'Eylau, she had scarcely any contact with Catholic society.

Almost without warning, her grandmother and Mademoiselle Agathe died one after the other, leaving this child of sixteen alone and deserted. To Antoinette the idea of living with her own parents seemed terrifying. She was at pains, however, to hide the dislike she felt for her cold and haughty mother. With her father she seemed more at ease, since he was obviously unhappy, for all that he possessed his wife's love. One day beside a well in which a frog was croaking, he remarked sadly to his daughter, "I am the frog at the bottom of the well, you are that swallow flying over there, because you have a fortune. Don't fritter away your fortune or you will also become a frog in a well."

At eighteen she made her début in the country at La Touche, the Tourangeau château of her parents. Guests came to the affair from forty leagues away—by no means a small undertaking in those days of stagecoaches. They arrived from all directions, but chiefly from Saumur and Tours, and were in-

vited to spend the night either at the house or in one of the surrounding properties. The immediate admiration that her daughter inspired delighted grandmother, who being vain was enchanted with a success which raised her standing in the eyes of her neighbours. For the first time she was discovering this girl, so popular in spite of her stiff and astonishing attitude of timid and unbending aloofness, with whom nevertheless she had little in common.

About a week later Monsieur de Sizy, who had married her husband's sister, Amélie, drove over to call on grandmother from his estate some six kilometres distant. He was accompanied by his son, Louis: a blond, distinguished-looking young man—a little too tall, perhaps, and this peculiarity caused him to adopt a slightly stooping carriage. He had vague green eyes, and his fingers were noticeably long, slender, and artistic. On the whole he gave the impression of a reserved and retiring character. Both these gentlemen were dressed formally, their hands gloved in white doe-skin—a significant detail. In an embarrassed manner, Monsieur de Sizy had come to ask for Antoinette's hand on behalf of his son and heir. He had yielded in his opposition to the match after Louis had pleaded with him for a full year. The young man was desperately infatuated, and desired at all costs to marry his cousin.

Grandmother had them conducted politely from the house, after remarking with some finality, "It would be almost incestuous. For nothing in the world," she went on, "would I permit the risk of a marriage between first cousins."

When her parents had explained to her the folly of the proposal, Antoinette dissolved in tears. Pretending that their health required it, Madame Montigny and her daughter left immediately to take treatments at the water resort of Plombières. By chance they met there an old gentleman, named Théodore de Bourbonne, who knew the town and the surrounding countryside château by château, after having traversed every drawing-room in the Foubourg Saint-Germain. A few days later he presented himself to grandmother, accompanied by a young cavalry officer whom he hastened to introduce as "my nephew, Count Maxence d'Entremont."

From that time on those gentlemen never left the ladies.

Towards the end of the cure mother received a proposal from Lieutenant d'Entremont. She considered it for two days. Life would be much simplified that way, she thought. Of course, there was Louis de Sizzy, with whom she had promised to elope when she was twenty-one, but that meant waiting three boring years, cloistered at La Touche. The Count d'Entremont, on the other hand, enjoyed an entertaining life: he was fond of horses and racing; belonged to a smart regiment; and she perceived that with him she would meet amusing people; would be invited to stay with them; would go to many balls . . . It was true that Louis was handsome and refined. With him, however, it would mean remaining in the country all through the year. They would have to live with his parents at Laufleur, a great moated castle, dating from Louis XIII. It would be very elegant, no doubt, but she had not been brought up to life in the country. Though Maxence was not romantic-looking, he was a distinguished gentleman, with the smart bearing of a cavalry officer. His somewhat myopic eyesight gave him an excuse to wear a monocle with notable grace, and his conversation on subjects such as the theatre and Montmartre showed that he was evidently a man-about-town thoroughly familiar with the more interesting features of night-life in the metropolis.

Thus, trying to decide on the most difficult question that can come to a girl, Antoinette hesitated to make up her mind. I will marry him at once, she thought. The family will be rid of me, and I shall be free of them that way, in any case. Then there is Louis! Heavens, what shall I do? No, I could never endure this winter with only three months in Paris. To remain at La Touche with mother and her sad face would kill me. At last, therefore, she came to the conclusion that she must accept Maxence, despite her small enthusiasm at the prospect, and though she still retained in her heart many regrets and a tender longing for her cousin Louis.

When no answer seemed to be forthcoming to the demand in marriage, Monsieur de Bourbonne made thinly veiled allusions to the subject, but Madame Montigny could give no immediate reply. It seemed proper that she should first consult her husband. The truth, however, was that, infatuated by money and the prospect of having a well-to-do son-in-law, she had already

approved the match on behalf of the whole family. When the young couple said good-bye, it was with the understanding that they were engaged, and that they would meet again at La Touche in September, where Maxence, ostensibly invited for the shooting, would have the opportunity to meet Monsieur Montigny.

As it turned out, the two got along splendidly. It was quite remarkable, really, since the young man was only a poor shot. Together they discussed famous horses and beautiful women, going over those inexhaustible topics with the captious judgment of experts. Their conversations proved refreshing to the older man whose information on such matters had perhaps become a little rusty.

In October the Montignys went to Paris to meet the parents of Maxence. With the formality of the times, everything took place in the prescribed manner. The families called on each other ceremoniously. The gentlemen wore frock coats, top hats, and white kid gloves; in their hands they carried gold-headed walking-canes of rare malacca. They would enter the drawing-room still bearing all this equipment, and having been invited to sit down, placed their hats and gloves on the floor beside their chairs. No one relaxed on those occasions, the ladies in rustling silk dresses and the gentlemen, still holding their canes before them, sat bolt upright and discoursed in carefully studied, humourless phrases. I have no doubt that remarks such as, "We would be so happy if you could come to the opera with us on Monday," or, "I understand, Monsieur, that you have a splendid shoot in the country," were typical of those meetings, at which the two families were trying to make a good impression in each other, and be quite certain they said nothing to invite criticism. After this came visits of the notary to arrange the amount and conditions of the dowry; then followed gifts of great bouquets of flowers daily, from the most expensive florist, of course; fine jewels for the fiancée, and finally the official dinner to announce the betrothal.

Already at this time the mother of Maxence was desperately ill with an incurable malady. She died in the spring, a few months later. It was because of this sad event that the wedding was only an intimate affair at the Church of Saint-Honoré, with

a small reception afterwards. All marriages are the same and this one did not differ. It included the usual phenomena. The bride was in white, wearing a veil of antique lace that had served many times in her family. The groom, in full regimentals, exhibited a nervousness he failed to conceal with a generous application of face powder; cousins, male and female, never seen except on such occasions, appeared mysteriously from their hidden retreats; bridesmaids, stuffed awkwardly into velvet or taffeta, bore aigrette and ostrich plumes. Handshakes were followed by embarrassed exclamations, "We must kiss now that we belong to the family; how-do-you-do, darling; how are you, my dear friend; heartiest congratulations; what beautiful presents—I cannot take my eyes off them, etc., etc." Amid all this social turmoil waiters zigzagged with cakes, slices of ham, foie gras, sandwiches, champagne, in fact *Le Tout Rebattet, pour le Tout-Paris*. Nothing changes in this world, particularly the formula for getting married.

The honeymoon took place in Italy. The young couple went to Venice; then Rome, and finally to Naples where mother's Aunt Laetitia and Uncle Emmanuel, whom she had met when a little girl, still resided. It was there that papa ate his first orange, picked straight from a tree and still warm from the sun. He recalled this event all the rest of his life as an experience fit only for the gods. "Oh, those Neapolitans," he would remark, "they are ragged and lousy, but they are happy because they can eat such oranges."

On account of father's military duties, my parents returned to live at Senlis, and this delighted mother. The colonel of the regiment—a distant cousin—did everything to make their lives agreeable, although his wife was the pet aversion of the regiment. I can remember her well, as she used to visit La Borne Blanche frequently, and never missed an opportunity to cadge a lunch at the house. In her position as a rich, pretentious woman with the authoritative advantage of her husband's rank, it was her cowardly pleasure to dominate and harass the families of the junior officers whom she considered not smart enough socially.

Grandmother had become friendly with her so as to be able, perhaps, to gossip about and slander the pretty women of the neighbourhood, who used to retaliate behind their backs by call-

ing them "old, scandal-mongering magpies." The rest of our family detested her. Papa told some time later how her husband, who was then a general, in order to explain to his officers the reason for his delay in attending a conference, remarked, "Please excuse me, gentlemen, for causing you to wait, I have just made the regiment cuckold—with my wife." It was hardly a jest, since, in addition to being so unkind, his wife spent her time offering herself to the timid and frightened young officers of the garrison. Fortunately for mother, owing to their somewhat vague family relationship, she was in the position of a protégée and was much envied on that account, because, in spite of her faults, everyone had to try to stay in the good graces of that horrible old pest.

About two years after his marriage, an incident nearly brought an end to father's military career. His colonel's influence managed to extricate him from an extremely difficult situation. Strikes had broken out at Lille, and the regiment had been sent in haste to take charge of the affair. Angry workers had begun to fire on the troops that were holding them back. In the midst of this, father with a detail of cavalry was attacked by a butcher, who hit his dragoon helmet with a stone and followed it up with insulting remarks. At which father in uncontrollable rage drew his sabre and cut off the man's nose with a single blow. The mayor of Lille thereupon demanded the arrest and conviction—it was election time—"of this aristocrat, this wild beast, this drinker of the blood of the people." It turned into a big affair; there was a veritable scandal; the revolutionary papers worked it up into a tragedy. Somehow the colonel managed to smooth things over, after giving his lieutenant-cousin an extremely harsh rating. Years later at various family dinners I heard the old man describe the episode at least twenty times. "Ah, my poor Maxence," he would remark, "it was the days of our youth. Our blood was hot then. Now I am like a dying fish. I have only a few wiggles left in my tail." The grown-ups would look at their plates in embarrassment, when he uttered these words which may, indeed, have had some indelicate implications.

It was about at that time, when father was still a lieutenant of dragoons, that La Borne Blanche was purchased. Mother's

dowry produced an income of thirty-five thousand gold francs, without counting a legacy "clear and free" of six hundred thousand francs which Grandmother Fréteval left her in the will. It was from this fund that the property, improvements, furniture, horses and carriages were paid. When I was born, my parents had been occupying the place about three years. In portraits taken at that time by the local photographer, I lay in the arms of a robust nanny who wore a ponderous, twilled satin bonnet. I was a dark little creature, smiling to high heaven, with my straight hair dressed in a fussy coil on the top of my head.

Of my baptism I remember nothing, though on the contrary I recall extremely well when my young brother, Jean-Marie, went through the same experience. It took place the moment mother was sufficiently recovered, at the beginning of the summer. I was going on five years old then. My hair was tightly curled beneath a picture hat in natural straw, tied on with a ribbon under my chin. I had a new cambric dress, scalloped at the edge; over this was a cloth coat with an Irish-lace collar; and I must not omit that I wore gloves of *filozelle*, white socks of fine silk, and shoes of buckskin. Thus arrayed, for hours at a time I admired myself in a mirror, to such effect that I am still able to remember the occasion, though perhaps aided by a photograph which for years could be seen among the pages of a book in green plush where many other faces of persons, long forgotten, stared out in solemn self-consciousness. They formed the unknown world of my relations which Monsieur Daguerre immobilized thus for the posterity of our family. In the book I was duly installed and identified. Heaven knows where I have disappeared to now in company with those other faces, some of them sinister, some old, young, middle-aged, each in the appropriate costume of his time. Everyone was there: father, his brother Sosthène, mother, my grandparents Amaury and Blanche d'Entremont, with their brothers and sisters and all their offspring. Some were leaning gracefully against romantic rocks, others sat stiffly in formal chairs, but particularly they were posed in elaborate groups, where each individual seemed anxious to be in the picture and was feeling pretty constipated about it, at that.

I must admit I did not appear very much more at ease myself. My eyes were startled and anxious as I craned to see the "little bird", and I was further occupied with my small brother, who, in a beautiful lace dress falling to the floor, displayed the vague and pointless grin of the very young, as far as it could be discerned in the shadow of a sort of old woman's bonnet beneath which the poor child was suffocating.

For the baptism everyone was in his *trente-et-un*. It was one of those rare events when the whole household from cellar to garret was in furbelows. Tata was positively dazzling in a white blouse, spangled with pearls, and a striped skirt that was too tight for her. This ensemble we were to see for the next ten years at church on Sundays. But to tell the truth, apart from the menservants, in a livery of royal blue and yellow—the colours of my father—that whole day had the atmosphere of a middle-class fête. On her floppy straw hat Miss Hayes had planted an ostrich feather. Ballou, father's old friend, had specially waxed his blond moustache and ironed his topper, the better to fulfil his responsibilities as godfather. The newborn child, his nurse and parents led the procession in the victoria, with two men on the box, cockades in their hats, while the visors of the horses were decorated with blue cornflowers. Next followed Miss Hayes and I, accompanied by three young friends, in the pony-cart. Then came all the guests in their finest turn-outs. At the village the local fire department welcomed us with a fanfare of trumpets, to honour my father, who had been elected mayor, while children from the schoolhouse, dressed in white, strewed flowers before the carriages.

On reaching the church, my young friends and I were given baskets, filled with sugar-almonds smelling deliciously of vanilla. By handfuls we scattered these sweets before the villagers who scrambled for the dainties like chickens at feeding time. Years later those worthy people would recall to me the noble extravagance of that day.

My brother was baptized in the crowded church, by the light of massed candles, and to the sound of bells peeling joyously. When we returned from the ceremony a Gargantuan feast was served, and dancing began as soon as the clergyman had left, for he too had come to drink champagne to the health of the

child, and to receive little boxes of sugar-almonds tied in pale blue ribbons.

When are you going to have another little brother, Made-moiselle Simone? the villagers used to ask me, removing their caps politely.

To tell the truth I did not want another, and already disliked this one, who seemed to be adored by everyone in the house. It did not suit me that the last should be first, as appeared now to be the case. Thinking about this unjust situation, the grown-ups often caught me with my eyes gazing into space, as I communed with myself on how undeserved was the admiration this little monster was receiving.

Mother said, "He is such a pretty boy." Like her, he had blue eyes; and, like the little St. John in the church, he had fair curly hair. To me, mother remarked, "You look too much like your father, you have the manners of a boy." At which I would stand before her with my arms swinging, wanting to cry, but laughing stupidly instead.

Thus it went until one day, at about the age of three, my brother found himself deserted with me on the frozen steppes of maternal indifference. Father had shown him less and less affection, perhaps on account of his budding Grecian nose. "He does not belong to my family," he said, looking at the poor child with distaste.

On the Easter morning, when at last Jean-Marie had learned to walk, mother led us to the chicken-house where, in celebration of that day alone in the year, we were to discover that the pious hens had laid hard-boiled eggs in a variety of brilliant colours. They made us scream with joy. In the summer when it was hot we used to be bathed on the front steps of the château. On such occasions great care was taken that not a ray of sun should reach us.

"The sun cooks the blood," Tata would remark judiciously.

We had two dogs: Cora, a French bulldog belonging to maman, had the run of the house; and Sultan, a Great Dane, who lived in a kennel and acted as night watchman. During our walks in the forest we would take Sultan along on a leash. If by chance a tramp appeared in our path, we shouted at him

to hide, because our dog, brought up in fine company, threatened to tear the throat out of anyone dressed in rags. From the first days of spring until late in the autumn we used to go for these walks where we breathed the delicious, mossy essence of the woods. The gentle breeze was lost beneath the green arches of the trees, a soft wave of perfume guided our steps to the hidden treasures of the wild strawberries, glistening like rubies in their leafy bowers; the sweet scent of honeysuckle, the tempting roundness of white mushrooms, carried us from one delight to another. Through the lofty highways of the forest birds of every form flitted: ring-doves in soft tones of beige, sprightly tomtits, robins with scarlet breasts, crows in sombre garb; while down below squirrels pursued their tireless game of hide-and-seek behind tree trunks, rabbits scampered in timid haste from our laughing advance, through sparse openings the rays of the sun struggled with just enough intensity to light the dark grass and betray shrinking lilies-of-the-valley for our hot little hands.

In the midst of these sylvan wanderings we hear an echo. Is it Merlin the sorcerer? Something alarming seems to be following us. It is, no doubt, the illusion of silence, that curious impression of not being quite alone, which causes us to huddle together. Meanwhile a butterfly flits past on wings mottled in grey and fawn. The spell is broken, Miss Hayes points it out resting on a flower. I think how wonderful it is to live, to laugh, to roll on the ground beneath the century-old trees. I always have loved to roll, no matter where, but best of all on a well-clipped lawn or on the thick woven rugs in the great drawing-rooms of my childhood. It would be amusing, I thought, if father and mother were less occupied with other people and would play with me and the dogs. Though they were younger than Miss Hayes, they were certainly more staid. "Don't make so much noise, you are too noisy," they said.

There were generally many people visiting in the house whom I disliked, since on their account I had to be always quiet. The guest-rooms were occupied more or less continuously by new or old faces. Because of them I had to behave thus and so, above all I must be silent like a shadow. "Children should be seen and not heard" was a precept that never ceased to assail my unresponsive ears.

From the age of seven I was allowed to dine with my parents when there was no company. Towards the end of the meal I would usually begin to doze. Then papa would exclaim, "Adrien, the sponge!" These esoteric words would wake me with a jump, knowing that they meant a spongeful of icy water in my face.

Miss Hayes said, "It is barbarous."

But father, who understood English a little, pretended not to have heard, and remarked in a constrained manner, "If she were a dormouse, I would dip her head in the teapot."

It was at the table that I learned about the intimate life of all those we knew in Paris and the provinces, not to mention people we had never seen but of whom we had heard. From my earliest childhood the conversation revolved around practically the same subjects: births and deaths would be discussed at great length, while the effect of these events on those immediately concerned would be thoroughly gone into; then there was considerable gossiping about the latest scandal, related in such a way that my young mind would fail to grasp the affair; but for the most part the table-talk had to do with racing, with horses, sales at Tattersall's, hunting, and what was said at the club. Never did the question of money appear—to speak of money was taboo. It was a vulgar topic.

From the time when I first began to take notice of things at La Borne Blanche, my favourite pastime was to watch what was going on below from my ambush on the top landing behind the great corner pillars of the staircase. And this was particularly so when there was a gala party. It seemed to me—so impressive were the circumstances—that the large social entertainments of my parents were scarcely earthly affairs; I fancied my parents as ethereal creatures. The *débutantes* and younger girls were, surely, nothing less than fairies, sparkling beneath the crystal candelabras of the great hall. From time to time I recognized people I knew, who somehow had got themselves invited to the magic court.

Mid all this hubbub, I made my choice for the fairy queen and the hunchback witch, selecting them from the assembly of titled personages who had come such considerable distances with the incredible energy people of that class were ready to employ for

a little diversion. Watching from my machan on the top floor I was the witness one evening of a scene that left me pensive. It had to do with a Monsieur de Jousselin—a gentleman I did not care for, though I knew him well, since he had been wearing out our parquets for many years with his high-heeled boots, and casting a supercilious eye on all our appointments with his insolent monocle. From me he had acquired the nickname of “wicked prince”. One day I had surprised him kicking the hindquarters of our bitch, Cora, in a methodical and magisterial manner. I had also heard him tell mother, when she asked why the animal was yelping, that he had accidentally stepped on the poor beast’s foot.

Well, one night during a dinner dance the wicked prince, looking most elegant in his pink coat, went up the staircase with a ravishing young lady on his arm. He called her his “beautiful angel”. They stopped at the first landing where there was a sofa in a window niche. Without warning the beautiful angel began kissing her cavalier with great passion. Horrified, I fled to find my governess who was knitting in her room, and told her about this remarkable episode. She took me on her knees, and said in her soft, sad voice, “Forget about it.”

At this moment the door opened suddenly and mother appeared, pale as death. Miss Hayes jumped to her feet, I almost fell down from surprise. Mother had never looked so lovely. Her pearl necklace gleamed on her shoulders, her blue satin dress covered with sequins glittered like the stars.

“What did you see on the staircase?” she asked me, point-blank.

From childish innocence, or perhaps because it had been dinned into my ears that one should never lie, I replied, “I saw Monsieur de Jousselin kissing a young lady.”

Mother left the room hurriedly, slamming the door, and remained in bed for a month—with an attack of jaundice.

Later on in the year we went to the marriage of the wicked prince. It was the first I was allowed to attend. In spite of the brilliance of the golden altar, of the sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows, of the whisperings among the ladies, and the rustling of their silk dresses, I began yawning until I fell asleep. This occurred notwithstanding ceaseless admonitions

that refined little girls must know how to be bored gracefully.

In July father went to Marienbad to take the waters accompanied by mother. It was a ritual he maintained all his life. Each summer he would go through a strenuous regimen to remove the fifty pounds he had accumulated during the previous year. But when mother returned she vowed the place would never see her again. "Those dreary forests of pine trees, the fat and sweating Germans, everyone rushing about with an artificial colic, I have never seen such a country or such an atmosphere, it was simply appalling, my dear!" *That* was her verdict, and we knew she meant it, if determination had any cogency.

My parents brought me back a collection of grotesque postcards I glued into an album with delight, and in September they took me with them to visit my grandparents, the Montignys. It was the first time I had been there, and the trip was undertaken because father wanted to buy the share of his brother, Sosthène, in one of the family properties left by Grandmother d'Entremont.

"Your mother will help me," he said to maman, at which she replied without enthusiasm, "All right, let us go."

Father cordially detested the old lady, but "business is business."

It required a whole month to settle the matter. Anticipating the delay, father had brought several horses along with him, as well as Alphonse Ballou, his intimate and inseparable companion since the days when they were at a Jesuit school together. He had no money and lived six months of the year as a parasite in our household. The fact is that my parents had grown somewhat tired of each other's company, and needed the distraction of a third party to entertain them. Uncle Ballou, as I called him, was ideal for the purpose. He would go on errands for mother in the pony-cart, was always available as an extra man, had a fund of amusing stories, and in general played the part of court jester in a satisfactory if rather ponderous fashion. In accordance with the primitive humour of those days, he also busied himself at devising practical jokes. From Paris he used to bring some that were ready-made, and among others one in chocolate representing a dog's dropping which he placed delicately on the damask of the most valuable armchair in the drawing-

room; thereby filling the house with screams of horror and rage. His most regular occupation, however, was the daily task of exercising the horses—an ineluctable job from which no male guest was excused.

Each morning the maids distributed the trays of the *petit déjeuner* throughout the house. It is an infernal invention, this French breakfast in bed, where from the first bite of toast you must begin struggling with the crumbs that find their way beneath the sheets to tickle your calves, and where the menace of a cupful of hot coffee, spilling into your lap, is a danger not to be lightly dismissed. After breakfast we dressed and gathered at the stables at half-past nine to take out the horses. Usually the men of the house would start off at full gallop, while I would follow less vigorously either on my pony or on “Vaillante”, a very steady mare. We took the main bridlepeth which was regularly harrowed, and smelled deliciously of loamy soil. Here and there it was necessary to jump a ditch or make a *détour* to avoid the hedges father had installed, not at all to my liking. This bridlepeth, known as the “Allée Ronde”, measured about two kilometres and formed the boundary of our park. Beyond lay the forest, separated from the estate with wire netting so as to preserve the flower-beds of the countess from the inroads of wild rabbits.

I did not attempt to keep up with the centaurs, and was content to maintain a comfortable trot. When they overtook me, they would shout, “What are you dreaming about? Get on with it, fat mother! Try galloping, you might lose some weight!”

I knew they were not worried about my figure, it was the condition of the horses that concerned them.

In the spring I adored loitering in the early morning, when there was no rain, in that part of the Allée where pink hawthorns spread their branches with such an overwhelming beauty and aroma that their sap seemed to flow into my very heart. I had known those trees ever since I was born. From the window beside my cradle I must have always admired them. In the summer, however, it was the fields of golden wheat—so golden as to be dazzling—that caused me to halt my gentle steed during our matinal rounds. Through the woods before the château a wide clearing had been left to the east, giving a view

across the plain for twenty kilometres to the pointed spires of Senlis. It was in this flat expanse that the rich cultivation of the countryside spread, field on field, to the veiled horizon. Slightly to the south, tucked away in a small corner of the plain, so close that I could almost see the butcher's dog asleep in his doorway, the tiny village of Orry-la-Ville, which looms so large on my passport as my "place of birth", gleamed brightly with its white stucco walls and red-tiled roofs. Such were my distractions from a too energetic promenade on horseback. Miss Hayes complained to father that I was wasting most of the morning at these equestrian exercises. She was right, but after all it was necessary to keep the pony and Vaillante in good shape.

In reply to these reproaches, father would explain that with so many horses the stablemen had an impossible task. There was all the harness to keep bright and the carriages to clean. "Furthermore, Miss Hayes," he would add, "I cannot ride that old mare myself; besides, it is good for the girl. Riding is the best way to develop a healthy body."

The poor Englishwoman could not argue the point with Monsieur le Comte, of course, since he showed so little interest in my education; and the countess would only say, "Do the best you can."

One day a donkey was purchased for my little brother; and, naturally, I wanted to ride the newcomer when we went out with it in the forest. I got the animal into a gallop so successfully that it ran away and threw me off in royal fashion. They had to put me to bed, my nose bleeding like a pig. From that day I acquired the nickname of "Miss Fraidy Cat", as in consequence I refused to mount any animal I did not know.

Perhaps on account of my Neapolitan ancestors, I was born lazy. My parents, in any case, being similarly inclined, did nothing to change my attitude. This regrettable fact became obvious during our stay at La Touche with mother's parents.

Grandmother Montigny began asking me questions to which I replied with meagre success. When she got me to read aloud, she exclaimed, "You are stuttering. Miss Hayes, she is stuttering, it is terrible!"

"I know, Madame, but Monsieur le Comte believes that she should ride horseback instead of studying."

Grandmother raised her eyes to heaven, "And what about her English?"

My governess in a pillory had to admit that I refused to speak English.

"And her piano?"

The fact was that I used to kick the piano so hard with my feet that Miss Hayes had given up the idea of teaching me.

"What a charming child!" said grandmother, leaving her embroidery for a moment to look at me severely. "But what does she like to do?"

"Nothing; she sits in a chair dreaming."

People were always asking me why I was dreaming.

"I dream of many things," I replied. "About things that hurry too fast through my head, things as vague as white clouds drifting through the summer sky. I can never remember what they are."

Grandmother complained to her daughter concerning my lack of education, and mother promised that in October the matter would be taken in hand; but she changed the subject quickly, since she had a horror of receiving advice, and knew that once grandmother started there was no stopping her. The old lady really disapproved of every feature in my parents' lives. When she came to La Borne Blanche, she entered the house with her skirts raised halfway to her knees. It was her way of saying that she was afraid of getting soiled in such immoral surroundings. The gesture drove papa into a frenzy of rage.

As soon as we were alone in the salon, grandmother began a jeremiad against the society we frequented. "I have heard a frightful story about your friend, little Mademoiselle So-and-So," she remarked; or, "Did you know that all your private affairs are an open secret, they say?"

To which mother replied, "They' are pigs."

"Antoinette, you express yourself like a woman of the streets."

At night in their bedroom, maman, mixing her metaphors somewhat, agreed. "You are right, Maxence, mother is impossible; she is an old camel, who has never escaped from her medieval dungeon."

When nobody was about, father revenged himself on her as best he could. With Ballou to keep watch, he shot her chickens

and guinea-hens with his duelling pistol, excusing his brutality on the grounds of needing target practice.

At dinner the old lady complained that there was scarcely a fowl left in the poultry-yard. "It must be the foxes, Antoine," she said to her husband. "I beg you to tell the gamekeeper."

Whereupon father, mother, and Ballou smiled discreetly at their plates.

Before dinner a bell struck twice. The first stroke meant there was just time to dress, the second announced that we were expected in the drawing-room. Everyone was in his best bib-and-tucker for the meal which was long, tedious, but succulent. At these ceremonies conversation was handicapped because of the few interests they had in common. The smallest details or the most trivial subjects had to be spaded up to fill a hole in a silence that was often awkward. The men, of course, sometimes came to the rescue with stories of hunting or shooting that scarcely entertained the ladies, but consumed time. The ladies would retaliate with discussions on clothes, on parties in the neighbourhood, and in fact on anything no matter how futile that came into their heads. There were a few breaths of fresh air in the form of letters. Miss Hayes had her news from England, mother got some communications with local gossip from our own country, while father—without revealing what he received—went daily on horseback to fetch his mail at the village post office.

I believe that grandmother finally decided to help her son-in-law in his business venture from the sheer necessity of somehow getting us out of the house.

Ballou was frank when he left. "The people she knows are not amusing," he remarked, "they are just a flock of old hens."

When our cavalcade finally issued from her property, our numerous carriages loaded down with game, trunks, and human occupants, the old lady must have murmured without regret, "What swine, what swine!"

We brought back only one novelty from Touraine. It was mother's cousin, Louis de Sizy. He followed us, arriving at La Borne Blanche practically at the same time as our trunks, and from then on he scarcely ever left our family. It was during our stay at La Touche that mother and he had renewed a senti-

mental friendship, which, as I have related, might at one time have ended in marriage. His father had died recently, leaving a fine fortune, gathered through sordid economy and a frantic, anxious pinching. Though still in partial mourning, Louis had come to a dinner given by my grandparents in honour of father and mother. I was presented to him shortly before the meal, and though almost asleep from fatigue, could not help noticing how much he resembled the pictures of the ancient Gauls, illustrated in my history book of France. I was disappointed a little, just the same, that his drooping moustache was not quite as long as that of Vercingétorix. Nevertheless, he was a fine figure of a man with a straight nose and a proud, fierce look. As far as papa was concerned, the dinner had not proved worth while. He complained bitterly to Ballou, since this was his only opportunity of meeting the people in the neighbourhood, that the social side of his visit had been wasted. There was not in his opinion a single pretty woman to disturb his peace. He spoke with horror of a table partner who had poisoned the evening for him by coquettish foot-play. On his other side a skinny countess with dagger elbows and a backbone like a picket fence had proved so talkative he had never been able to get a word in. The wretched creature had positively made an attack on his virtue. "Think of it, on me," he groaned, "who only care for pretty girls. If she had pushed me any further, I would not have hesitated to affirm that I never deceive my wife."

"What about my case?" said Ballou; "imagine the time I had with that fat blonde who spent the whole evening telling me about her brother, little Félix, and his bad taste in taking up with a girl in a house of ill-fame. As if I could do anything about it. Oh, la-la, what an affair!"

Mother was the only one who had enjoyed herself owing to the discovery of Louis. They had both been delighted, it seemed. He had much charm, and she begged him to return frequently and help distract her husband and Ballou, who must surely be bored to extinction in that household. Living near-by he appeared promptly the next morning with a general invitation to lunch for everyone.

Louis' mother, my grand-aunt, Amélie, was a vast, imposing person, who smelled of eau-de-Cologne, and whose face was

covered with regrettable black whiskers. My small brother refused to kiss her when we arrived for the party, "Because men don't kiss," he lisped. For the first time, I thought, he was showing good sense.

Madame de Sizy received us stiffly in a great hall, thickly studded with the mounted heads of boars and roebucks. From one of them hung a curved French hunting-horn, glistening in yellow brass. For my part the luncheon proved disappointing, as there were no *Pithiviers* cakes of almond paste; father and Ballou agreed furthermore that they would never again accompany the family to such a boring affair, though they admitted that Louis was a charming man who must find it pretty dull to have to live in that sombre castle with a bearded woman.

Thereafter mother took to playing tennis regularly with Louis. It was a game at which he excelled. With him, too, she went riding, having refused the offers of papa and Ballou to escort her, on account of their mania for galloping all the time so as to reduce their waist-lines. The outcome of the visit was that on our return to La Borne Blanche, Monsieur de Sizy became a fixture there. The only fly in the ointment concerned his interludes at the piano. They annoyed father and disturbed his afternoon naps. On the other hand, Louis helped exercise the horses—a virtue that merited considerable indulgence. His defection from Touraine brought with it whole chapters of complaints.

Grandmother Montigny informed us that her sister-in-law, Amélie, was distressed at the bad influence my parents exerted on poor Louis, until then a steady and serious boy, but now completely lost. She went on "I have no advice to give you, my children, but you should tell him to return at once to Laufleur, where he has much to occupy him."

Nothing happened, however, and he did not leave us until the end of the hunting season, after "the happiest days of my life," so he assured my parents, as he kissed mother's hand and warmly thanked papa. His affairs at Laufleur did not detain him long, and he was back to La Borne Blanche by the first of September.

From time to time mother went to Paris. When father accompanied her, they stayed with Uncle Sosthène, whose house, on

the Champs-Élysées, we always called "29". If she made the trip by herself, she usually went to the apartment of her most intimate friend, Gisèle d'Orlangues. This lady was of such startling bloneness that other women claimed they were her intimate friends so as to earn some credit as reflected beauties. When mother sat beside this luminescent creature, it seemed as if blackness were starting from her very skin. "It must be black like an oven inside you," a witness of this curious association once remarked to her tactlessly.

My uncle was passionately taken with Gisèle d'Orlangues, whose husband was well born, but had no title, no money, no wits, and no charm. As a matter of fact, I liked Monsieur d'Orlangues. He used to go for walks with me, when visiting at La Borne Blanche, and he won my heart because he showed interest in an old pigeon named "Vulture", whom I adored in spite of his bad habit of depositing visiting cards on our hats. Monsieur d'Orlangues was really a good though spineless man. He was fated to be rebuked and insulted by his wife, not because she was unkind, but because she despised him. It could not be said that her own family was illustrious. Her father, a speculator on the stock exchange, had died in the midst of an unfortunate gamble. Gisèle managed to support her family with the income from her modest dowry. She had remained virtuous until my uncle had succeeded in overpowering her resistance with his millions in a seven-day assault. The grown-ups would talk about her without paying attention to my presence. "Simone is such a baby," they would remark, "she does not understand." But as one becomes older the ears of childhood take notice. Bread cast upon the waters returns after many days. Those scattered phrases were by no means lost on me.

Monsieur de Sizy almost immediately became my adored "Uncle Louis". For no reason he detested my brother from the start, though whether it was on account of his unfortunate Grecian nose, or because of a natural antipathy, I never knew. When our doctor recommended a stay in the mountains for the child, he strongly supported the idea without appearing so to do. "The brat looks sick," he said, observing Jean-Marie with

a none too sympathetic eye. Mother decided Switzerland was necessary. The son and heir was packed off with Brigitte, his governess.

A peculiarity of our family was that no one ever quarrelled. Harsh words were never exchanged. At the most little darts of malice were dispatched haphazard to find their mark in tender spots. Father was a choleric man, but his anger was reserved for those outside the family circle. He had been too well brought up by his mother to transgress the code of good manners in his home. Ballou was discreetly self-restrained. When anything annoyed or upset him, he became scarlet—even more than usual, if possible, since he was red-headed to start with and of an exceedingly ruddy complexion.

Father exclaimed in such circumstances, "Look out, Ballou is catching fire!"

I believe Uncle Louis was the only one who might have enjoyed a good scene.

"He is a gloomy individual," mother complained, "and is jealous of everything, including his shadow. What a curse it is!"

As Louis could not show his displeasure in our house, he had to be content with long recriminations, in the form of a monologue to which nobody listened.

Gisèle d'Orlangués used to remark to mother, "Antoinette, I admire you. You have a way of making people dance to your tune without ever opening your mouth. I have to scream to get anyone to listen."

"You are exaggerating," mother replied, "all I do is leave them in peace."

"Tarata, ta," laughed Gisèle.

Without effort maman was able, in effect, to make everyone hop to her wishes. She kept us all in a holy terror. When I see a marionette show, I think of her method of pulling the strings to control us. She never raised her voice or spoke one word louder than another, but the strength of her will-power was in consequence all the more dramatic. Uncle Sosthène was the only person who could stand up to her. Sometimes he remarked with a chuckle, "If we were married, my dear. I would give you a good smack every so often."

Wednesday was always a bye-day for the men of the château.

After lunch they would slink away noiselessly, to escape mother's "at home" function. It was an affair that upset the entire routine of the household. Occasionally father would reappear if there were a pretty woman in the offing, or if his own pursuits happened to lack interest; sometimes he would retire into a window seat with one of the guests. In the evening, reporting his experience he said, "Old What's-his-name button-holed me to recount the death of Louis XVI." Father had an immense collection of phrases, proverbs, or trite sayings which enabled him to remark appropriately on any circumstance that could possibly transpire. They were always available on the tip of his tongue and in this manner he gave the impression of being exceedingly alert conversationally, whereas in fact it was simply a matter of producing from a pigeonhole in his memory the correct comment for the occasion. Thus one could be sure, whenever he had been bored by the talk of anyone, father would profess that the subject discussed had been precisely the death of France's sixteenth Louis.

I believe that no one enjoyed the "at homes" except myself. The tea included delicious cakes, and besides I did not have to study during the afternoon. I thought mother's Wednesdays were really much pleasanter than Sundays: I was able to go riding, and did not have to attend Mass. After lunch I could sleep in peace until three o'clock; then I was primped to the ultimate degree and dressed in my prettiest clothes for exhibition to the visitors.

Father called this weekly performance "The day of virtue". "One only sees virtuous faces at such affairs, and that is particularly so in my house," he complained.

"It is the Faubourg Saint-Germain," mother replied, smiling complacently. "I don't care what you say about them, I was not born in that crowd, thank heaven."

Those "she-camels", as papa called them, were in fact the wives of officers or important ladies of the conservative set, each one blessed with numerous children. Our intimate friends came rarely to an "at home". Father called them *les intimes*, which did not mean they were real friends. They consisted of fashionable men, and pretty women who smelled deliciously.

"Antoinette," father would exclaim, "please stop inviting So-

and-So all the time. His wife is hideous, and I have to entertain her the whole evening. She gives me indigestion."

"You are impossible, Maxence, with your stomach troubles. I cannot invite manikins, you know."

"It would be less boring if she did, wouldn't it, Ballou? Imagine if little Mimi were here!" and the two burst into laughter.

On one of those tedious "days" something really happened. The party was proceeding smoothly in its routine manner. The guests had passed into the dining-room for tea. The soft languors of spring filtered in through the open windows with their usual relaxing stupor. After a hundred curtsies I was resting against the great arch of the chimney-piece, listening to the buzz of pointless conversation. My dog Cora and I were entertaining each other as best we could. Suddenly a long, tattered creature entered through the French windows. Everyone was transfixed. The apparition advanced. It was a young woman, her hair on end, her eyes wild and strange. With precocious discretion I hid behind a sofa. Many of the guests would have liked to do the same, I believe.

A courageous gentleman advanced toward her. "What do you want?"

"I want to eat, I am hungry."

At this moment Adrien arrived, followed by the second man. They led her to the pantry where, amid tears, she divulged her sad story.

The first chapter could scarcely have been more commonplace. It included as *dramatis personæ*: a cruel stepmother; the fiancé, a handsome young man; and a rich, aged suitor whom she refused to marry. To preserve her plighted word and protect her honour she had fled. For six days she had remained in the forest—a circumstance that appeared to me more than heroic in view of the ferocity of the wild boars and the danger from poisonous snakes.

When the tale had been reported, mother announced that she was a "tragedian".

"She's not so terribly ugly," said father.

"She has neither breasts nor buttocks," was Ballou's appraisal.

"I'm sorry for the poor girl," Uncle Louis admitted.

Once a month the parish priest was invited for lunch. The Curé Chavier was a charming man, and he detested the Jesuits—a prejudice which delighted my mother who also held them in aversion. The three gentlemen smiled indulgently when, encouraged by the priest, she became sarcastic on the subject.

"You know, Madame la Comtesse," the old man complained, "what ruffles me is that prominent people leave so many legacies to the Jesuits. The Marquise de Saint-Aulage, for instance, gave them a thousand francs not a month ago. I knew of her intention, but to me she refused the smallest alms for the poor people of the village. It really is not fair."

Mother remarked, "Those fearful Jesuits, think of it! And, Monsieur le Curé, everyone rushes to be seen at their evening prayer."

"You don't understand at all," said the men, who after the fashion of well-bred young boys had each of them been to the Jesuit school in the rue de Madrid.

"I don't understand?" she replied, now thoroughly vexed. "You all smell of Jesuits a mile off. You have the same defects as they, you never say what you think."

"He who knows not how to be silent knows not how to live," intoned my father. "It would be a fine business if everyone said what he thought."

"I do not see how you can utter such things, Antoinette, you, who have pretensions to be incomprehensible," said Louis, for once becoming a trifle sarcastic.

"I am only incomprehensible because I prefer not to have people poking their noses into my affairs."

"Come, now, please give up arguing. Monsieur le Curé, don't you think we should put out this burning question?" father interjected, with a malicious and indulgent smile.

The next morning while out riding I kept thinking, those Jesuits must be fearful people. Monsieur le Doyen Chavier is always right, I must go and talk with him on the subject. Though I was absolutely forbidden to leave the park, I passed through the little door which led into the forest and made my way cautiously to the house of the priest in the village. I found him weeding his vegetable garden. "Monsieur le Curé, I have come to talk to you about the Jesuits. Is it really true, as mother

said, that they do not even give a glass of water to the poor? If that is so, what is the use of being a priest? And what are these Jesuits, anyway?"

He began to laugh, his kindly face, as red as a tomato, wrinkled up like an accordion. "Madame your mother is never wrong, by dear little girl; the Jesuits, they are, among the clergy, what one might call 'the foxes'. But I will explain all that to you when you are older. In the meantime be kind to the poor, keep thinking about our beloved God. Now tell me," he went on, "when are you and your Miss going to bring me some white roses for the Holy Virgin?"

"This afternoon, this afternoon, Monsieur le Doyen. I must run back now, or they will think I am dead."

I would have liked to enter the forest more often, but there were such horrible stories they read to me from the papers, about children being cut to pieces in the woods. Why, why in the world, I asked myself, are there people with the bad habit of chopping up little girls?

Nothing could have been more tedious than my riding in the park, particularly because of the hedges I had to jump, or avoid if possible, an alternative that infuriated my father. I used to excuse myself, of course. "I am afraid of falling off, I don't want to get another scar on my face."

"Oh, that scar!" mother exclaimed, starting out of her indifference for a moment, and observing my cheek with interest. "I am wondering if it will ever go away. What a stupid accident that was! Some day I shall be killed, I suppose. The horses cannot get used to the trains. All the same we were lucky, you and I, that we were not hurt worse."

Our tilbury had turned over on us when we were returning from a call. The horse, frightened by the noise of a train, had run away and upset the carriage. Mother had her knee broken and my face was cut in two places. The coachman alone had the luck to jump out of danger.

Once a week during the winter I went hunting with my parents. Usually I followed behind them on my old Vaillante, accompanied by a groom. The hunt took place in the forest of Chantilly under conditions quite different from those of other countries. A large pack of French hounds pursued a stag

through trees growing so densely together as to prevent the possibility of following the quarry on horseback. The forest was, however, criss-crossed by a network of drives bordered with grassy slopes. Along these shoulders the hunt servants galloped blowing their horns, and thus helped the members to maintain touch with the chase when the music of the hounds grew too faint. There was, naturally, no occasion to do any jumping, but great distances were covered by those who enjoyed the open air, or who sought exercise in the course of the day. It must be admitted that many of the guests had no sporting ideas in their heads. They were invited by the master and they accepted with alacrity from boredom, from snobbery, or so as to be in the swim. To keep up with their neighbours was a vital necessity. Among the men, those who took part regularly and had been accorded the hunt button were dressed in "pink", while the ladies wore three-cornered hats trimmed with gold braid. These persons were the serious members of the hunt. Others had different thoughts on more or less laudable grounds. "There is a rather pretty woman," said one of these; "her hind-quarters are sufficiently ample to keep her in the saddle, they must help her to stick on all right." Or, a lady rider would cry out, "Good morning, my dear," and then gallop off hastily to escape from a distributor of platitudes in a pink coat, whom she, no doubt, referred to privately as the "ace of spades" in spite of his elegant turn-out. Amid all these trivialities the really impressive feature of the hunt, as everywhere, was the extraordinary and unbridled profanity of the master. He would shout remarks at the top of his voice to the most innocent of followers without any regard to the laws of slander or the everyday condemnation of obscenity. Why this polite social pursuit should always produce such manners is somewhat mystifying.

When father dismounted in the forest during one of these hunts, he would invariably remove his hat ceremoniously and mutter to himself between his teeth, "Sir, I know nothing more agreeable than to piss outdoors in the fresh air." It was a remark that, in his opinion, covered the situation appropriately. One would think that a man so devoted to horses would have none except the best; but in this instance his idiosyncrasy (which he excused on the grounds of economy) allowed him to pur-

chase only the most vicious animals. The low price he paid on account of their reputations had, of course, nothing to do with lack of cash; but, being exceedingly brave and an incomparable horseman, he preferred a mount requiring skill to ride. "Providing a horse has good legs and does not roll, I can manage to get along with him," he would say. In our stable there was always at least one with a crime on its record. "This horse killed his last owner," or, "That roan over there broke the back of a lady a year ago. I got him for nothing," father exulted.

"It's a fancy, like any other, seeking to be assassinated by your horse; but why argue with lunatics?" said mother.

On one occasion, among many, his horse ran away and he was thrown into the small pond, *de la Reine Blanche*, where, stunned, he almost drowned, and was forced in consequence to remain two months in bed from an attack of pneumonia. Recounting the incident, he explained, "That foul piece of horse-flesh knew I had strong ribs, so he tried to kill me by destroying my lungs."

Mother had retained a slight limp from her broken knee. It gave her an excellent reason for escaping from tedious duties. She would simply say, "My knee hurts me." As a matter of fact the accident with the *tilbury* saved her life. It had been arranged that two days later she was to assist at the *Bazar de la Charité*. The *Marquise de Cap* had asked her to act as saleslady at her booth. The *Marquise* and all her friends were burned to death in the disastrous fire which broke out that day, and killed almost a thousand of the most important society people assembled for the affair.

The first time I went to Paris was on a visit to my father's brother, *Uncle Sosthène*, and *Aunt Adèle*. I had been promised that I would meet their only child, *Catherine*, to whose birth father always referred to as the "miraculous conception", why, I did not understand. The train was a local and it took almost two hours for the trip. Our compartment smelled of smoke and the vibration stirred me up like lettuce in a salad bowl. It made me sick to my stomach. At the first level-crossing I saw all our servants waving their handkerchiefs to wish me *bon voyage*, but I was disappointed at not being able to catch a glimpse of our house, as it was hidden behind a curtain of forest trees. The

windows of the coach were misty, and this gave me an opportunity to write my name, "Simone", with the tip of my finger all over the glass. An old gentleman, annoyed, no doubt, at being so shaken about, thereupon raised his hat and remarked with great dignity, "Excuse me, Mademoiselle, but permit me to observe that only idiots write their names everywhere."

I sat there with my mouth open, and finally nestled close to Miss Hayes, who threw a cold and severe glance towards the insolent person. At the Gare du Nord something wonderful was waiting for us. It was a great black box which went by itself. They explained to me that it was an electric automobile, and inside I was introduced to my cousin, Catherine, a girl, about two years older than myself, who was usually known as "Cathy". I must have appeared a country bumpkin, because she remarked immediately, "How red your cheeks are!"

I looked and marvelled at her white plush hat with pale-blue ostrich feathers, and at her luscious, golden curls. She seemed interesting, but I formed a dislike at once for her governess, Miss Daley, who cawed at us like an old crow.

At "29" I joined my parents, and in the evening was introduced for the second time to an uncle and aunt I had seen only once before, at my brother's christening.

"How healthy she looks," they remarked; "Cathy is positively white beside her. Miss Hayes, what do you give her to eat? . . . What? She drinks red wine? But that is impossible! It stops children from growing. Cathy has never tasted wine."

"It is Monsieur le Comte's orders."

"What? She eats a raw lamb chop in bouillon three times a week? Cathy is only allowed white meat."

"It is the idea of Madame la Comtesse."

"Well, it sounds like Henry IV. Do you rub her lips with a clove of garlic each morning?" asked Uncle Sosthène, laughing.

Christmas time was in the offing, and the house seemed to me like fairyland. The top floor was reserved for my cousin and her friends. Among other temptations it included a long corridor with a waxed floor along which I was aching to slide, but this was strictly forbidden. My little brother, Jean-Marie, arrived with his governess, Brigitte, who succeeded at the very start in

committing a fearful blunder. As she was ascending the marble staircase she met a dark, little shadow of a woman.

"Please tell Madame la Vicomtesse that we have arrived," she ordered in a superior tone of voice.

"I am Madame la Vicomtesse," said the humble shadow. Brigitte nearly fainted.

My aunt was perhaps the most hideous woman I have ever known. Father used to say, when speaking of anyone particularly ugly, "My God, she is not as awful as Adèle!"

Mother felt pity for her, and tried to help with her clothes, but in the end only succeeded in giving her the appearance of an organ-grinder's monkey. "Adèle, put on some powder, your nose is shining. Adèle, take off your hat, you look like a mushroom!" Such cries from mother had little effect. One could not expect miracles.

Poor Aunt Adèle, she was a genuine living martyr. Even at my childish age I took note of her ugliness. She was really kind and tender. She spoke hardly ever and always looked terrified, but in spite of that I did not like her, as she appeared scarcely human. Her father, a Monsieur Poitiers, was a Parisian notary descended from a long line of notaries. Looking at him one would judge that he had always been old, and that, buried in notarial documents, he had never known what was happiness. He had married late in life an old maid who was as rich as he. They had a son, Victor, a half-mad creature, and a daughter, Adèle, who for all her life had to wear a plaster cast. The lunatic son and the daughter spent their childhood in a depressing house in Le Marais, which they were only permitted to leave occasionally for a walk in the Tuileries. They were never taken into the country for a holiday. While still young their mother, a dull and unimaginative woman, died. Although shut up in a dungeon, so to speak, Adèle, was rated as one of the wealthiest girls of the city, and, in consequence, a distant cousin with a marriageable son began thinking of her as a prospect in his connection. It was necessary, however, that the affair should be handled in the conventional manner, and so a ball was given to introduce her to the world of notaries. It is a mystery how my father and Uncle Sosthène happened to be invited, since they had nothing in common with that austere set.

At any rate they went to Adèle's ball, and she lost her peace of mind. A few days later she was informed by her father of his desire that she should marry the distant cousin.

"I do not care for the man," she replied; "if I marry it will only be with Sosthène d'Entremont."

"Sosthène d'Entremont?" said her father in a daze. "Who is he? I must make inquiries."

"Inquiries or no, if I marry it will have to be with him." Perhaps she might have done better if she had accepted her notarial cousin.

When grandmother was approached on the subject, she demurred, and then summoned her son hastily. In truth, as a practical woman, she was enchanted with a marriage that would bring millions. "Listen, Sosthène, you must marry her," she urged. "Her plaster cast does not interfere with her energy, and, besides, she has a large dowry. Money is the most necessary thing in life. Why ever do you suppose I married your father? You may be in love with someone else, but you will get over it. You have intelligence, it is true, and want to become a lawyer; but that is stupid. People of our class don't work. We are fairly well-off; you should reflect, however, that your father and I are not dead yet. Sosthène, listen to your mother, I know what I am talking about. You must be reasonable. Though she is not pretty, marriage always beautifies women. My son, money is worth having, you must consent, you must do it."

Sosthène, feeling somewhat like a lamb led to the slaughter, married her, and ruined his life. His heart became frozen. "Everything is for sale," he professed from then on.

Mother came to think that he was a merciless man, and remarked at grandmother's funeral that he had a handkerchief with a wide black hem but not a tear to drop in it. Perhaps he never forgave her for the marriage into which she persuaded him.

That Christmas at Uncle Sosthène's was the first I spent in great luxury, but in his house everything was done extravagantly. My parents thought the celebration was pretentious and not at all in the style of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Lackeys in knee breeches, with white stockings, patent-leather shoes, and silver buckles, cluttered up the house. Beyond the drawing-

room there was a great ballroom with mirrors on all the walls. The curtains were festooned with a multitude of tassels; the furniture was too highly gilded; at every landing of the marble staircase there was a bronze negro figure bearing a vase filled with rare flowers.

"What are all those negroes for?" I asked mother.

"Perhaps to show what is the height of bad taste," she answered.

Father Christmas brought me princely gifts: a doll as large as myself, and a trunk filled with her underwear and shoes: also her hatbox, with hats and bonnets for every season of the year. In leather cases I received, besides, a cross in turquoise with a golden chain, and sufficient cones of marrons glacés to give me indigestion for six months. Not only this, but our bedrooms and playroom were filled with toys that littered the place without purpose so it seemed. We wandered from one to another. I remember in particular a doll's china tea-set, with which we played at making calls. My brother took the part of a butler or of a little boy who was scolded for misbehaviour; Cathy was the duchess; and I impersonated a gossiping visitor. Then, the miniature grocery shop looked fascinating, but we had none of us entered a grocery. We had not realized that rice and tapioca were sold in sacks, having never seen such staples except in moist and sticky puddings. The present which pleased me most was a Scotch doll from Miss Hayes. We christened her with kisses and sugar-almonds, and named her "Bonnie".

Cathy, though older than I, did not seem half as alert mentally. She lived almost entirely in the house with Miss Daley, who was always in a state of being shocked or terrified by life. My aunt did not pay attention to her daughter, and was occupied continually with charitable affairs. As a consequence Cathy enjoyed scarcely any feeling of home-life or the contact of close family friends. My uncle was generally away travelling. He had bought with his wife's money an immense estate in Egypt, near Luxor, and this took up much of his time. He had, besides, a racing stable he maintained in Ireland, with horses in training there and in England as well. When in Paris he lived more or less openly with Gisèle d'Orlangues. She went regularly to the

aces with him, and had the bad taste on such occasions to wear an ensemble to match his racing colours. They neither of them made any attempt to hide the affair.

My father was horrified at this, and remarked to mother on the subject: "One must have an extraordinary position or prestige to be excused such goings-on. I am the last person to judge people; as far as I am concerned women can have as many lovers as they like, providing they behave properly; but I cannot tolerate a liaison that invites, closely or distantly, the breath of scandal. I would prefer, my dear Antoinette, that you do not give the slightest appearance of co-operating in your life with that of Gisèle. In truth, we have never discussed this matter between us because I conceive that there are in fact a great number of things of which a husband and wife, who respect each other, do not speak. I have talked of it with Loius, and he is in complete agreement with my point of view."

"You are quite right," said mother. "I think Gisèle is reckless, but you must not forget, my dear Maxence, that Sosthène paid off all your debts last year: I have no great sympathy for that individual, but he has behaved very generously toward us."

In spite of these remonstrances, mother remained friendly with Gisèle all her life. "She has ideas that amuse me like no one else's," she laughed.

Uncle Louis murmured: "They are the ideas of a mad-woman, and they are a bad influence. The other day I heard her advising you to come to Paris to live; that the country is boring, and that you are losing your youth there. After all, she is not such a devoted friend of yours. She told me, "Antoinette would be very pretty if she did not have such crooked teeth."

"But it is true that my teeth are crooked," replied mother, suddenly somewhat taken aback.

Everyone remained sitting in chairs too much at "29". It seemed to me we were all stuck to our seats, particularly we children. We never went horseback riding, for instance. I kept thinking about my dear Vaillante who must be unhappy without me. If there was the smallest ray of sunshine Cathy and I would be taken out in the morning to the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, but we were so wrapped up we could scarcely walk.

Aunt Adèle was particularly afraid we would catch a chill. It was a universal complex of those days. If we allowed ourselves the luxury of a single cough we were confined to our rooms for a week. The possibility of contracting a cold was a hazard that had to be combated with every unhygienic resource of those times. All windows were promptly closed; we were overwhelmed with sweater on sweater; a steam kettle poured eucalyptus fumes upon us night and day; we could scarcely have been rendered more miserable.

If we were not in quarantine, so to speak, our return from a walk involved a period of rest for our tired bodies. We were then permitted only the most conservative distractions. Miss Hayes would read to us stories of little, goody-goody English girls. Then lunch was served at which we were inevitably forced to eat breast of chicken, though I always preferred the drumstick. Afterwards we had to sleep so as to be rested for a drive in the electric to the Pré Catelan, where, once more, we had to sit in folding chairs for tea. With luck we would have a chance to join with other society children in a game of *pigeon vole*. When we got home, our clothes were changed once more, and we went to the drawing-room, where Aunt Adèle kissed each of us in an anxious manner. Seated in a circle on arm-chairs heavily garnished with silk fringes, Miss Daley then gave an account of the incidents of the day, while Miss Hayes nodded her head in confirmation.

At some of these reunions mother appeared, smelling deliciously of violets or lilacs. She would always inquire, "Well, has everything been all right?" Then she would disappear in a hurry after some perfunctory kisses, because she was late.

Our dinner took place upstairs. It was a dignified affair, served by a footman in plush breeches, his calves bulging in white cotton stockings. Once more we ate breast of chicken off silver platters. Finally we went down again to say good-night to the family in their respective dressing-rooms, where they were generally getting ready for dining out. Mother, looking as smooth and polished as a crystal globe, would speak of going to the opera—a circumstance that filled me with awe. Later, when I had heard father complaining how he had suffered a thousand tortures at the opera, I had occasion to change my

opinion. I must confess, however, that I came to the same conclusion as he of my own accord. At a rather early age I was dragged to watch fat ladies and elderly tenors, sitting on fragile benches, and dying at the tops of their voices from feigned love. I was not amused.

Mother, who adored music and did not appreciate father's agony, would remark, "They invented the ballet girls especially for you, Maxence. Here, look at the 'rats' through my opera-glasses."

"Leave me alone, I detest the rats, they never wash, and they sleep with everyone."

"Be quiet, Maxence," said mother in a shocked voice.

Ten days after Christmas I was again in the electric and jumping with joy at the idea of leaving. Miss Hayes begged me to appear less happy. "Tell Cathy how much you enjoyed yourself, kiss her tenderly, be nice."

While she was occupied in expressing her thanks elaborately, I rushed ahead so as to be sure not to miss the train which would take me back, at last, to La Borne Blanche. "No, Miss Hayes, I don't like '29', it is too boring. Everyone is afraid of draughts. You spend your time yawning and dropping curtsies to the grown-ups. They are always whispering among themselves. At home it is true that they are not tremendously affectionate, but there are always new people to meet and old friends to tease me. Then think of my dogs and horses, and besides our servants are not like statues. Remember the little girls of the neighbours, who ask me to tea and to play hide-and-seek. Please, Miss Hayes, tell mother I don't like Paris, and tell father I don't want to go back there."

Uncle Sosthène never got over his jealousy at the life we led. He could not understand why in his home only deadheads were in evidence. In the back of his mind it infuriated him when he recalled how my parents had said that the set he knew went with the style of his household.

As for Uncle Louis, he detested, at whatever distance, everything that had to do with "29" or its owners. "They are outsiders," he observed disdainfully. "Adèle is stupid, their home looks like the new-rich, it's a veritable Palais de l'Élysée."

Father did not like very much these remarks about his

brother, and would offer a lukewarm phrase to defend him, but at the bottom of his heart he knew Louis was right.

A few days after our return, we were awakened in the middle of the night by a woman crying for help. The gatekeeper had recognized her at the lodge and after ringing a bell to warn the château had allowed her to enter the park in her brougham. I rushed down in my bare feet to see what was happening. Father was in the hall, wearing his nightcap and with a lighted candle in his hand. He had on a dressing-gown and was busy giving orders and taking counsel with Uncle Louis and Ballou. Mother waited to clothe herself more conventionally. In the hall I discovered that the Countess Libourne—on old lady owning a property quite close to us—was lapping up large quantities of brandy while our servants were ministering to her coachman who was wallowing in blood. I was told that on their way back through the deep forest from a dinner they had been attacked by men with revolvers. Luckily the horses became frightened and ran away; but the coachman, though wounded, managed to keep hold of the reins. The story made me tremble.

Miss Hayes said, "Let's go, this is no place for a child."

I began to kick her shins, and since she was quite as curious as I, we remained to see the matter out. The countess stayed to sleep in the house, and under a seal of secrecy confided that the would-be assassins were her scoundrelly brothers-in-law, who when she died would inherit her fortune and castle. She eventually signed a complaint against "persons unknown".

Father decided that it was a sombre affair.

When a telegram arrived at the house someone always remarked, "It is surely bad news." Everyone detested telegrams, and one of them—to show how sure were their instincts—announced that Gisèle d'Orlangues was dying. Mother was entreated to come and see her. It did not take her long to have a small valise packed and be driven at a fast trot to the station. The next day the men were wandering about the house, whistling to celebrate their unexpected freedom. As soon as mother's back was turned, everything changed. It was as if an enforced reserve was suddenly removed. Uncle Louis forgot to be affected and smoked his pipe in every room; Ballou dared lean back on the satin sofas without regard to the pomade on his

hair; father invited the people mother did not like or whom she would not receive in the house. Among others there was a very pretty little Madame Roblot, who was separated from her husband. The men all thought her charming, as she was expert at showing horses in competitions and could tell capital stories. The ladies with a safe position in society thought otherwise; they called her a tart.

Hiding on my landing at the top of the stairs, I saw her arrive for dinner and noticed her red hair, her pink-and-white complexion, and her laugh that displayed beautiful teeth. Father excelled himself in being agreeable; Ballou, fascinated, watched her approvingly as he curled his silky moustache; Uncle Louis spent the evening playing emotional waltzes on the piano.

At an early age I had been taught not to repeat things no matter what I heard. When I said to mother, "I was told this or I saw that . . ." she looked at me with steely eyes.

"Well-brought-up children hear nothing and see nothing," she said severely.

Miss Hayes was the only one in whom I confided. Generally she would remark, "Forget about it." When Tata told me anything, it was under a pledge of profound secrecy. Thus, when mother kissed me on her return from Paris and asked Miss Hayes, "Is everything all right?" I made no comment. A few days later, however, when we happened to pass the pretty red-head in Chantilly, I exclaimed, "Hullo, there is Madame Roblot!"

"How do you know about her?" mother asked in surprise.

"Oh," I replied quickly, with a faint, malicious smile, "I have seen her in church."

"In church? You astonish me . . . Well, of course, anything is possible."

I got a scolding from Miss Hayes that night, for lying. "Besides, your tongue is too long," she added.

The bulletins on the health of Gisèle did not improve. One day I asked Uncle Louis, point-blank, "What is wrong with Madame d'Orlangues?"

"Hm . . ." volunteered Ballou, who was well used to children, "she has bought a little boy for herself."

"She has bought a little boy? Ah? Where can one buy boys?"

"What questions you ask!" Miss Hayes interjected hastily. "Leave your poor uncles in peace."

"But I want to know where you can buy them. Tell me, Uncle Ballou, is it in a big store?"

"No, Petit Coco, it is in the gardens of Paris; they find little girls in rose-bushes and little boys always sit in a cabbage leaf."

I began to reflect on this interesting information. "Well, why is Madame d'Orlangués ill?"

"Now you have me in a corner, why don't you ask Uncle Louis?"

"Here, stop asking me impossible questions! Ask your father."

"Don't annoy me," cried this last, hurrying out of the room. As he turned into the hall he threw over his shoulder, "Ask Miss Hayes."

Miss Hayes then began to tell me a long story which wandered completely away from the point. In the meanwhile, as this was obviously one of those grown-up mysteries where one gets words without facts, I began playing with my Scotch doll, who I presumed must have been born in a rose-bush—red roses, I hoped.

Mother decided that Gisèle would come to stay with us for the summer. Her husband would be with the children at his mother's house. When father heard the news he raised his hands to heaven, in despair. Uncle Louis sought refuge in Touraine, and Ballou threatened, almost seriously, to go back to his home in Saint-Valéry. When she arrived in a wheel-chair with a tiny baby, the poor woman looked so thin and pale that the men were thoroughly upset in spite of their callousness. Privately it was whispered that she would never walk again, that she was paralyzed for life—poor Gisèle! In the country air she improved, however, though she seemed to have lost her laughing, carefree manner. Being fond of good food, she was placed in charge of the menus, which she discussed by the hour with Tata.

Once, when the question came up of what to order for my lunch, the old cook exclaimed, "Madame need never ask what Mademoiselle Simone desires, she only cares for sweet desserts. Madame has not been informed that when Mademoiselle re-

turned from '29' this winter I said to her: 'Well, I suppose you have been eating ortolans at the house of your uncle, the viscount?' 'Don't annoy me,' she replied, 'hurry up and make me one of your vanilla *bouillis*, nice and burnt on the bottom, that is what I like best of all.'

Father rushed into mother's boudoir one morning, like a whirlwind. In his hand he brandished a letter from his brother. "Sosthène is coming here; the madman has rented a house at Chantilly. It appears that the air of our forest has been recommended by his doctors for the miraculous child."

"Maxence, you must stop that habit of calling your niece 'miraculous,' the time will come when someone will let the cat out of the bag, and Sosthène will be furious."

"Yes, I must stop it, but all the same she is a miraculous infant. If my sister-in-law had not gone to Lourdes, she would never have had a child, and even so, nothing might have happened without my brother, who is a real buck-rabbit."

The new baby Madame d'Orlangues had brought with her fascinated me. On tiptoes I would peer at him in his high cradle, all covered with lace. He had violet blue eyes, and a few blond hairs. I wondered how he managed to sit in a cabbage leaf without falling out. I would have loved to ask him, but he only opened his mouth to scream as if he were deaf.

The moment Uncle Sosthène arrived, he hastened to see us, without his wife. For hours he remained closeted in the suite of Gisèle and when he left I overheard him say, "Au revoir, my puss. Be good, everything will turn out perfectly. I adore my son, he is as beautiful as his mother, and we are as like as two raindrops."

This is a strange affair, I said to myself, as I sat at the top of the staircase, considering. My uncle has lost his head, the baby from the cabbage patch was purchased by Monsieur and Madame d'Orlangues; why does uncle call him "my son?" Father is right, my uncle is really crazy.

A few days later his whole family came to lunch with us. We had *tournedoes* with *sauce béarnaise* and *pommes de terre soufflées*. Gisèle knew it was my uncle's favourite dish. My cousin, Cathy, covered with ribbons and lace, and wearing patent-leather shoes, had great trouble running after me on the

gravel paths of the garden. Miss Daley never left us a moment to ourselves.

"Cathy, don't sit on the grass, you will catch cold. . . . Cathy, don't run about so much, you will be too warm. . . . Cathy, don't do this, don't do that. . . ."

"Miss Hayes, please don't let Miss Daley come here again, she will stop us from catching a cold," said my governess at last, laughing at it all and anticipating no doubt my own reaction.

Every day Uncle Sosthène drove over to see "his brother", but he disappeared at once into the room of the invalid. Occasionally he went riding with mother. One afternoon she returned in a fury. From then on she would not go out with him, remarking, "Sosthène is a disgusting monster—poor Adèle, poor Gisèle."

At the beginning of September I fell ill, for no apparent reason, and it had the immediate effect of emptying the château of all the guests. Our family doctor wished to call several specialists in consultation. Papa, remembering the celebrated Doctor Vaquez, who had taken care of Grandmother Entremont, wired him to come from Paris at all speed. When his funereal beard had brushed over my bedclothes and his greasy hair had been plastered against my chest for a long time, I thought I must be on the verge of death. In any case it was he who saved my life from a terrible attack of rheumatic fever. To cure me, in addition to numberless pills, my body was covered for many weeks with embrocation and bandages. I must not complain of the treatment, as I am alive today, whereas a young neighbour of ours died from the disease at about the same time.

Father suffered in this affair more than anyone. Like a tortured soul he paced up and down, occasionally sitting by the bed, smiling weakly, he would hold my hot little hand. Mother would come to see me three or four times a day. She was mostly occupied, however, receiving visitors, writing letters, and weaving tapestry. When I got better toward the end of October, she began hunting again; but father was too worried and refused to leave me by myself. In November Doctor Vaquez declared I was out of danger. The château began to wake from its torpor, people dared to raise their voices and laugh at jokes.

When they brought up a tray of steaming food for my lunch, father, in close attendance, would call out "Hot chestnuts, hot chestnuts!" At other times he would pet me or hum hunting tunes, which somehow seemed to carry an air, though they were all on the same note. His chief way of entertaining me, however, was to recount stories of his ancestors, and of this he never tired, nor in fact did I of hearing them. Lying flat on my back, with my bed in an alcove, I was now able to receive visits from my young friends, who brought me coloured prints of Epinal which I collected fervently; Mathilde, the coachman's wife, produced illustrated catalogues for me to cut up; I was given a subscription to *La Semaine de Suzette*; my mother's friends came upstairs to kiss me and offer congratulations on my convalescence. Uncle Ballou returned from Paris with half a dozen books from the famous Bibliothèque Rose which until then had not entered my life. I was fascinated at becoming acquainted for the first time with *Les Malheurs de Sophie* and *Le Général Dourakine*. Father and Uncle Ballou, smoking their cigars, would sit at my bedside and continue the same discussions about races and horses they had begun twenty years ago.

Uncle Louis arrived with presents and made me realize, as he tugged at my pigtails and teased me the way he always had, that my illness was over at last. "You were poisoned by your own naughtiness," he said.

"Oh, Uncle Louis, don't be an old rattlesnake," I protested. He had promised to give me a little white lamb in the spring. It would follow me wherever I went, he said. I kept reminding him of this. "Whatever you do, don't forget your promise, Uncle Louis."

To tell the truth everyone had been more than kind. Miss Hayes and Tata were really wonderful. They had sat up all night, taking turns watching me, and seemed determined to spoil me in every possible way.

"You don't like milk, Mademoiselle Simone? I will put some vanilla in it, that will give it a relish," said Tata.

My slightest desires were carried out at once. "Miss Hayes, tell me the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, and now please sing with father *Une Chanson d'Amour*, *Une Chanson d'Ivresse*. You are so funny when you pretend to be the prima donna, and

father plays the tenor." I went to sleep laughing at them.

Then, at night, lying back on my pillows, I would wake and listen, my heart beating, to the shrill screams of the trains rushing mysteriously in their headlong flight through the dark to the seaports of the north. The trains frightened me in those days, and I still cannot hear them without a shudder. Father had, in fact, told me that I would soon be on a train, that Uncle Louis had been so kind as to offer me a trip to Monte Carlo, where I would spend the whole winter in sunshine and would recover my strength.

In a few days Miss Hayes and I were off. With the help of the porter she managed to lift me into the upper berth—she was too fat to imitate a squirrel and climb there herself. Tata, with all her soul in it, had made up an over-generous picnic basket: chicken in jelly, hard-boiled eggs, ham, salad in mayonnaise, rosy-red apples, chocolate cake, milk, croissants, and heaven knows what else. "I suppose she thinks we are travelling to Peking," Miss Hayes observed with a smile.

At Monte Carlo I was put in a wheel-chair, being not yet able to walk. It distressed me as I considered what the other children would think when they saw me pass in such a frightful vehicle for invalids. When my governess was not looking, I tried a few steps, but my limbs were too weak and I fell to the ground. Was I going to be like Madame d'Orlangués? I asked myself.

A very stout woman came to massage me each morning, and told us all sorts of tales in the process. Miss Hayes enjoyed hearing gossip concerning anonymous persons of the English colony. She would interrupt to claim that she knew who those persons were. One of the stories had to do with a lady covered with jewellery who played roulette. "She must have been out of her mind," interjected Miss Hayes, to whom all gamblers appeared demented.

"This lady," continued the masseuse, "had been asked to tea by a young couple who were on their honeymoon. Between the toast and the jam they assassinated her."

"Assassinated! Why? How terrible! Was it for her jewels? Miss Hayes, we must not buy that coral brooch for mother. Jewellery is too dangerous."

After three weeks at Monte Carlo, I began to walk, little by little. It was as if my legs were thawing in the sunshine. A triumphant letter was sent in haste to La Borne Blanche.

My dear parents, my dear uncles:

I am no longer in the awful wheel-chair. I can walk on foot through the tunnel which leads from the Annex to the Métropole Hôtel. In the evening I wear my new pink dress in *crêpe de chine*. Uncle Louis, I have just begun a pair of slippers for you in needlework. They will have an arrow piercing a big red heart. I embrace you with all my strength. A thousand tender kisses from your little girl, who loves you all.

Simone.

At the end of January, mother arrived at Monte Carlo, but she stayed at the Hôtel de Paris, which was considered more fashionable than ours. In the afternoon her maid, Alice, came to join us on the sunny terrace of the Casino, where I showed her grottoes filled with goldfish and turtles. Alice was a great talker and chattered endlessly. "Madame la Comtesse is tremendously popular . . . Prince Vogoul has just sent her another basket of orchids . . ."

When I grow up, if I were sent anything, it would be forget-me-nots, cornflowers, or poppies, I feared.

In the Casino garden we sometimes met *maman*, and she would generally take us for a drive in a *fiacre* through the enchanting countryside. The brilliant golden sunlight threw every object up in curious relief against the purple, contrasting shadows; the deep blue of the sky and the even deeper ultramarine of the sea were breath-taking, while over all vibrated, so it seemed, the penetrating perfume of the scarlet pepper trees.

At a luxurious store mother was tempted to stop the carriage, and bought me three new dresses, a coat in *biege* cloth, and a hat to match. I was bewildered at my new outfit, as I had not seen such extravagance since the fatal hundred-and-ten dresses of my very young days.

One afternoon I was certain that I saw Uncle Louis. My governess assured me that I was quite mistaken, that I was

simply foolish. But I insisted that I had really and truly seen him, and in fact that he had smiled at me slightly as he hurried away.

Miss Hayes declared with finality, "It was someone who looked like him, that's all there is to it."

At Menton, mother had some friends with whom she went to stay for a few days. Alice remained with us at Monte Carlo. She was always discussing the affairs of her mistress. "Madame la Comtesse does not like the poor Russian gentleman. She thinks he is too foreign."

"Ah," said the old Englishwoman non-committally.

"But, there is an English lord . . ."

"What is his name?" asked Miss Hayes, roused from her prudent reserve.

"It's a name to give you a headache, something like Sir Ronald Unteengtone. It's an impossible name."

"I know whom you mean," Miss Hayes assured her, in a satisfied manner.

When mother returned from her visit, she complimented Miss Hayes on my excellent appearance. "I would like to give you a little present," she said to my governess, "but I have no imagination. Here is an envelope, buy what you want with it."

In the envelope was a five-hundred franc note. Miss Hayes almost collapsed from the shock. In the evening while she was twisting the curling-pins, after combing my hair with sweetened water so as to make my curls stick, she praised maman at some length, and reproached me for never being affectionate toward her.

"Well, Miss Hayes, you don't realize how cold she always is."

Father came to join us, and we remained there two more weeks. The English gentleman, of whom Alice had spoken, gave a great dinner in honour of my parents. I happened to be that evening in the small reception room of their apartment when some magnificent orchids arrived for mother. Hanging over the bacony, I thought that it must be a beautiful life among English lords or Russian princes, who cover you with flowers and offer you champagne to the music of tzigane orchestras. The music penetrated the windows of my room in the Métropole and lulled me to sleep.

On our return from the south, in the interval between two trains, we passed through the Place de la Concorde. Mother suggested that we should stop to rest ourselves at "29", but I would not consider the idea for a moment, and begged that we hurry home. Tata was waiting impatiently at the station to meet us when we arrived. I promptly handed her a little pig of carved pink coral attached to a golden chain.

"It is for good luck," explained Miss Hayes so as to leave no doubt about its significance.

Tata was overwhelmed with the present, and then began to remark how much better I looked. The château was terribly sad without you this winter, we must confess that we have missed you badly." The old woman went on mumbling. "Our news is not great. Monsieur le Doyen Chavier has been dismissed. A new young abbé has taken his place. Imagine, if you please, he is very friendly with the schoolmistress, the one who was so violently opposed to the curé last year. Yes, Miss Hayes, you can believe me when I tell you, she was seen going into the rectory last week wearing her best dress. I almost fell over backwards when I heard it."

That must be the Jesuits who are responsible for stealing away our Monsieur le Doyen, I thought sadly.

A few days later we met Moniseur and Madame Foyeot de Brandès, who had just purchased a near-by property called "Le Moulin". They were a charming young pair, very conservative and correct—so it was reported. It was not long before Count Bertrand de Sâblon, our master of hounds, came over to discuss them. He was a cynical old roué, who in spite of his faults had remained a great friend of father. His call had to do, naturally, with Madame de Brandès. Mother, who did not like Sâblon, summed up the situation pithily, "She is pretty, of course, but she is also virtuous. *There* is a woman on whom you will break your teeth, without satisfaction, my dear Bertrand."

"How do you know? All women are wenches," he said, in a testy and vexed manner.

"If you go on like that, I will box your ears," mother exclaimed, rising from her chair. "Furthermore, how can you speak that way? You had a mother, I suppose?"

"She was just another wench, that's all."

"You make me feel ill," and mother left the room haughtily, slamming the door behind her.

"Women are like that," said Sâblon; "they get on their high horse as soon as you tell them the truth. They know well enough that people don't want to eat prunes every day. Nobody was made to be faithful. There are few honest women who are not tired of their trade."

"All the same, you shall not talk such nonsense before Antoinette," father replied, offended, though not wishing to quarrel with his old friend. "She will have you shown out of the house one of these days and you will deserve it."

The newcomers became friends of our family very quickly. One day mother asked Madame de Brandès why she had decided to settle in that neighbourhood with her charming husband. "You ought to sell Le Moulin at once and go somewhere else in the province, where people are not so depraved as here."

Marthe de Brandès, who was somewhat priggish and very naïve, replied laughing, "Don't worry about us, Antoinette. Benoît and I adore each other, but above all we like to know smart people."

"Very possibly, very possibly, my dear child, but don't forget that even the most sincere love is apt to fade in a bad climate."

On the train returning from Monte Carlo, a family council was held on the subject of Gisèle's troubles.

"Sôsthène cannot desert the poor girl and leave her penniless," said mother irritably.

"I agree," father admitted, "but as you know, I cannot influence my brother, and after all it is not my affair."

"I will go and see him."

"Antoinette, you will get entangled in something which does not concern you."

"It would bring me bad luck if I did not help her. After all, we introduced her to that fearful brigand."

"All the Entremonts are brigands," father put in quickly. "We are descended straight from the robber barons of the Middle Ages."

"Oh, yes, perhaps you were descended straight from them—with a few little zigzags," said mother, scoffing.

Hayes, if they sell the house, what will happen to my vegetable garden, and who will take care of Vaillante?"

"Go to sleep, darling, I beg you. Think of other things. Think of the fine fox terrier that will soon be arriving from England."

"Bother the fox terrier! You know very well I don't like those English friends. They've infuriated Uncle Louis, and changed all mother's views. Between you and me, doesn't it seem to you that the English lord has too long teeth? And besides he was killing pigeons by the hundreds at Monte Carlo this winter. It is all very well for mother to say he has style, but I think he looks like a caricature. Uncle Ballou was right in paying no attention to the English lady when she looked so bored, with her superior air. As a matter of fact, it was I who advised Cora to water their shoes the day they found them wet outside their room."

"Simone, you are awful, you are a little monster. I will have to tell your father about you."

"You would be wasting your time. You know what the answer would be: 'Miss Hayes, that is your department, beat her if you wish.' And you would reply, 'Oh, Monsieur le Comte, what an idea!'"

Father had another hunting accident about that time, while riding Lady Grey, a vicious mare. She ran away with him unexpectedly and broke his right arm when he was thrown against a tree. Exasperated at being immobilized in his study, he fumed while mother tried amiably to entertain him.

"Maxence, the ravishing little Madame de Brandès has just called on me. Imagine, if you please, she is thrilled because that horrible Rissal is paying her ardent attention."

"He is a duke, my dear. *Vanité des vanitas, tout n'est que vanité.*"

"Don't be such a prig," said mother with fine sarcasm.

"That is nice talk from you, spending your time as you do sorting out the newcomers here, to find out who is who."

"Anyway, it is really lamentable to see so refreshing a young woman captured by the false teeth of such a fearful old wolf."

"You must not be naïve, my little Antoinette; your protégée is only seeking to throw her hat over the windmill. I would sug-

gest that she is among those women into whose heart, as they say, you can only drive with a four-in-hand coach. In her case it also requires the four horses of Lorraine."

Mother, somewhat depressed at father's estimate of the lady, and perhaps realizing that he was right, shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed, "Stop, you exhaust me with your eternal proverbs."

To which he replied sententiously, "Proverbs are the daughters of everyday experience, my beauty."

Ballou was the only member of the household who had tender feelings. He spent much effort trying by acts and words to bring loving sympathy into the atmosphere. It was no easy matter among people who mocked at everything and were only willing to consider high motives a sign of weakness. Good-naturedly, he would lift me up to "skin the cat" and turn somersaults, or take me on his knees and tell me long stories. "I saw you born in a rose, my Petit Coco," he said. And then he would go on with a thousand stories about a fabled prince in love with a poor young girl whose long flaxen hair hung to her knees. They got married, of course, and lived happily ever after, because they had many children.

"Uncle Ballou, I am wondering if no one lives very happily here because they don't have enough children."

"Perhaps that is the reason, Petit Coco, it is sad for us, and bad for France."

I was always wondering in my childish way whether Uncle Ballou would get married. I sometimes heard snatches of conversation which seemed to have some bearing on the question. His arguments with father on the subject of abstract and particular virtue were endless.

"You will end up a monk," scoffed father.

"No, I shall marry an ugly woman who will love me for myself. A pretty wife belongs to the world, an ugly one is your own," replied Ballou seriously.

"My poor friend, happiness is a tedious affair, I don't like to discourage you," father warned.

Mother and I went to the station in the tonneau to fetch a package from Paris one afternoon, and we saw there an astonishing woman who made me think of a peacock—in fact, she was

wearing some peacock feathers in her hat, from beneath which escaped a mass of golden-red hair attached precariously to that green edifice by a multitude of pins and feminine gadgets. I had never seen anyone so striking and so fussy.

Mother murmured to me, "Stop looking at that fearful person."

"Fearful?" What a funny thing to say, I thought. This remarkable creature was to mind extraordinary, with her face coated in brilliant colours like a restored portrait, with her free-and-easy demeanour, and her little disingenuous exclamations. Mother obviously did not appreciate her.

"Guess," she said to papa, the moment we reached the house; "whom do you suppose I saw at the station?"

"Who was it?"

"Your friend, Mademoiselle Cécile Coral, all painted up like a park bench."

"Mademoiselle Coral? Oh, yes, she has come to visit her father, the butcher, I suppose. I hardly know her, as a matter of fact, and I have never understood, furthermore, why she is such a success. She is a squawking bluejay, and is busy making soft eyes at the Minister of Education in the hope of being engaged at the Comédie Française."

Mother returned from England wearing a wonderful sapphire ring, which she had bought with her savings to complete a *parue* of jewellery. Sapphires matched her eyes, there was no doubt. One day when the Comtesse de Warné asked how much it cost, she whispered quickly, "Two thousand pounds; but don't tell Maxence, he would be furious."

"It is marvellous to be rich," sighed Madame de Warné in a slightly jealous and sardonic manner.

The Comtesse de Warné, another of mother's intimate friends, lived not far from us at Senlis. Married to a captain of dragoons, who was reported "dumb" enough to eat hay, she was small, with no looks, and was eternally suffocating in a whalebone corset. On the side of her chin she bore a mole that hypnotized me. From the mole sprouted several long hairs. If perplexed by any problem, she would twist the hairs with her fingers into a sort of corkscrew. In spite of this unusual adornment, she had great success with men, to whom she paid inordinate attention. She

had produced for her husband two handsome children: a boy as blond as ripe wheat, and a girl as black as jet. The boy was about my age. He was stupid and easy to bully. The girl, a charming child, adored the violin. I heard people predict that she would one day be a great artist. When she talked about a sonata of Beethoven, she impressed me, though at the same time I was somewhat shocked, having heard it stated fairly definitely that artists were outsiders with whom one should not be acquainted.

Louis, concerning whom Madame de Warné had retailed several small stories, said one day to father, "Maxence, be careful, she could make angels quarrel. Her tongue is soft, but it breaks bones."

"All women talk too much, except those who talk too little, and they are idiots," said father, composing in this instance an original, if somewhat lame dictum.

There was no doubt that Madame de Warné had a difficult character. She was always after her children, rebuking them in fearfully broken English.

"She hasn't an 'h' in her mouth," said Miss Hayes disdainfully.

Bertrand de Sâblon, who led a life of *bâton de chaise* in his little castle near-by, hated her without mincing matters. People said she gave him too much competition when it came to harsh judgments—a specialty on which he prided himself. He professed, indeed, that women should be kept in order or they would get out of hand and ruin one's reputation. In particular he felt this applied to "that bed-bug", as he called her, glaring malevolently in her direction.

Studying one day in my schoolroom, we heard some dull sounds rising from below. I was trying at the time to learn a little grammar and was seeking a pretext to escape from the task. After some discussion, Miss Hayes permitted me to take a peek from the top of the staircase. I could see nothing out of the ordinary, but there was a noise of furniture being moved about below, apparently in the dining-room. I scampered back to report on my scouting, and just then a metallic clatter rose to our ears. We remained in a state of suspense.

Finally, Miss Hayes said, "Let's go and see what is happening."

We rushed down the stairs. On the second floor the doors of

mother's boudoir were open, as were those of the dining-room and pantry on the ground floor. We glanced around quickly. There was nobody there. On the parquet floor chairs were lying upturned in every direction. One of the large silver candelabras lay there, badly dented, beside a broken steel knife.

We called out, "Ooh, ooh . . ." There was no reply. Suddenly we felt frightened. We went down to the basement. Again the place was empty; we could not find a soul in the laundry nor in the kitchens.

"One would think it is the castle of the Sleeping Beauty," remarked Miss Hayes, trying to joke, but with a catch in her breath.

"I'm afraid," I replied.

"So am I."

"Let's look in the garden."

We went as far as the lodge, where we found the doors wide open. We ran to the stables. Once more there was no one.

"But where are they?" I began to sob.

"Oh, Simone, stop that, you are getting on my nerves!"

The main gates of the park were also open, and we looked out along the road. At last in the distance we saw a group of people walking toward the village.

"I can see Tata and the gardener's wife," I exclaimed, a little reassured.

"Yes, I can, too," the old Englishwoman confirmed.

"Let's go and join them."

"All right," she said, looking back at the château as if it were haunted.

In the village every inhabitant knew what had occurred. We were brought up-to-date immediately. It appeared that Adrien had been in the pantry, reading the newspaper, when he heard a slight noise in the dining-room. He thought it might be a rat come to eat the cheese—the table had just been laid for dinner. Seizing a broom he hurried into the dining-room, and suddenly discovered a pale-faced man who was actually eating the cheese.

"Well, you have nerve spoiling my dessert!" Adrien exclaimed, realizing instantly that the man was a desperate character. His clothes showed in fact that he was a convict. Dropping his

broom, he hurled himself at the man, who instantly grabbed a knife from the table. They fought desperately, and it was the sounds of the struggle which we had heard upstairs. At last Adrien, no doubt better fed than the convict, got the upper hand. The second man arrived, having just finished dressing, and between them they over-powered the thief. In the meantime mother had seen the battle from the reception hall and at the risk of straining her legs had run to fetch the grooms and gardeners.

Papa returning to the house found it empty. He thought we had all been killed. With his coachmen, Rigobert, he went to look for our bodies, expecting the worst. After a while the voices of the women, on their way back from the village, reassured him. He listened to their story and was told the convict was a German, like so many other foul murderers, and had done to death no less than three victims. Adrien was rewarded for his courage and devotion with a handsome gift of money.

From that day father always referred to Adrien as "The Terrible Turk" on account of his wrestling ability. "It is not everyone," he said admiringly, "who can twist a steel knife out of shape with his little finger."

As far as I was concerned, these events made me so cautious that from then on I never went to sleep without first searching anxiously beneath my bed for robbers or assassins.

One afternoon at tea the new abbot suggested to mother that it was time for me to learn the catechism. "How right you are, how right you are, Monsieur l'Abbé. Please talk to Miss Hayes on the subject, I am surprised that she has not already thought of it."

Miss Hayes made what excuses she could. I imagine that the religious atmosphere of the house had not overwhelmed her, hitherto.

In this connection we went to see the young vicar, Monsieur l'Abbé Brulat, who had recently restored the vicarage. It seemed to me, however, that the garden was less well planted than in the day of my old friend the former incumbent. The ivy had been removed from the walls, as was also the case with a beautiful climbing rose-tree. They attracted spiders, the abbot assured me, in the manner of one who was certain of his facts. The

interior of the house by contrast was shining more brightly than before, having been newly subjected to soap, polishing, and excessive tidying. In the days of Abbot Chavier, the place had smelled of garlic and the odours of a laundry; now it sickened me with the fumes of turpentine and the dank moisture of holy water.

It was decided that I should take private instruction, as there was an epidemic of croup and lice among the children of the village. I was distressed at this news, as I was longing to join the classes for the catechism, where on wooden benches the children had such an amusing time nudging each other amid embarrassed giggles. It may have been splendid, but it was thoroughly boring to have to sit elegantly all by myself, on a prayer-stool of garnet-red velvet in the vestry, and mumble, without commas or ever taking breath, the eternal truths of the Catholic faith.

My parents did not follow the custom of some of their neighbours with an extravagant display of religious enthusiasm. They never missed attending Holy Mass on Sundays, naturally, as this was a matter of good manners and an example for the villagers. They insisted without argument that religion is necessary for the people; and they never questioned, of course, the existence of God and of all the Saints, though a daring newspaper had suggested recently that Jeanne d'Arc never lived. This article caused a great scandal which stirred our household with violent protestations. On Friday we ate only fish; on Good Friday it was cod-fish, boiled potatoes, and lentils—without a pat of butter. Yet, apart from these ordinary precautions to escape eternal fire, nobody made confession or went to communion service.

My family gave an important dinner about this time for the people living at the abbey a few miles away, in honour of the approaching marriage of the young lady there. The abbey had been bought a few years before by a Jewish banker, the Baron Salinger, who had an eligible son and a daughter.

As long as Uncle Louis lived with us, they could never be received at our home. He made frightful remarks about them, and would rush off to a neighbour's house in such an obvious manner the moment they appeared on the scene that everyone

was embarrassed. Discussing them with father, who was never anti-Jewish, he would refer to them as "Your Jewish pals".

"Excuse me," corrected father, "my friends are not Jews but Israelites."

"Have it your own way," Uncle Louis remarked sarcastically. "Your Israelites, or de luxe Jews, have a good idea of themselves and no mistake. They think they can buy anything. If you believe they are fond of you, my poor friend, you are making a sad mistake. As Pharisees they despise you. And since the Dreyfus affair . . ."

"You are wrong. I have some devoted friends among the Israelites, to whom I am also much attached. After all, if we Christians can afford to despise them, why should they not have the right to feel the same way toward us? Furthermore, they have justification for pride when it is considered that in spite of their small numbers they have produced such a large proportion of men famous in arts, literature, medicine, and philosophy—not to speak of business. You are prejudiced, my dear Louis. Besides, don't forget," he added with an ironical smile, "that everybody has a few drops of Jewish blood."

"I deny it; you are quite mad; I have no Jewish ancestors at all."

"All we Mediterraneans have some."

"Really, Maxence, you have theories which make me fall asleep on my feet," exclaimed Louis, shrugging his shoulders, while father laughed delightedly at his sally.

It had been necessary for father to insist with some vigour before mother had been willing to give the dinner for the family of Baron Salinger; but father felt it a duty in view of some excellent financial advice he had received from the man not long before. The least he could do was to return the favour in the only way open to him. "I wish I could feel the same way toward my other friends," he added bitterly. The Marquis de Lugol had managed a few months previously to lose four hundred thousand francs for him in an advertising venture. It was an affair he had been unable to digest easily, for he clung to his little *saint-frusquin* with great tenacity, and was ready to admit it, without concealment.

In my opinion Mademoiselle Salinger was not worth the

dinner, but no one paid attention to my ideas on such matters. She was a tall minx, quite pretty in a way, but given to assuming the air of an offended queen. My antipathy for her was due to her manner of treating me like a piece of furniture. It vexed me immensely. At the dinner I heard that she had been extremely discourteous to my cousin, Monsieur de Bourbonne, a boring old man I must admit, whose only topic was the royal family. Perhaps after all she was justified in this instance.

Her engagement to Prince Hermensdor was an astonishing circumstance. I, also, could not understand how he had been so easily "trapped"—as Uncle Ballou put it.

I had known the delightful young fellow with his fresh pink complexion for a long time. He was one of the models for Prince Charming among my fairy tales. His home was not far away in a forbidding château where he lived with his parents—a couple with a reputation for austerity unique in the surrounding countryside. The marriage had been "arranged", as a suitable match by negotiation through the lawyers of the two parties. Mademoiselle Salinger, adoring her father and having a great respect for his judgment, accepted the project without much recrimination. Reflecting on the matter, she concluded that a prince is always desirable, even if he turns out extremely tedious. In the young man's family there were, no doubt, some debts or mortgages falling due which brooked no delay on the grounds of true love.

My father remarked, with a short laugh, "Salinger goes right to the point when he states that there are only two satisfactions in this world: high birth and big fortunes. He is a practical man."

There was an informal dance after the dinner. The following day my family discussed it with reminiscent delight, although the behaviour of our neighbours of Le Moulin appeared to have somewhat shocked the other guests, and had cast a slight cloud over the proceedings. Young Madame de Brandès scandalized everyone, as she had not left the arm of her admirer, the old Duke de Rissal, throughout the evening; while her husband had been surprised feverishly kissing Pauline de Gaumont, a woman whose ideas on deportment were less than third-rate. Maman considered her an impossible woman, "a veritable bacchante".

In fact, mother was so indignant that she could scarcely contain herself; yet she had received the lady in an extremely gracious manner. To tell the truth, Madame de Gaumont held a position, owing to her exceedingly blue blood, that opened every door.

Father mockingly told his wife that the neighbours from Le Moulin would surely attain tremendous heights in society at their present rate of climb.

It was about at this time that Uncle Louis wrote to accept an invitation from father to spend three weeks with us during the hunting season.

"Well, Miss Hayes," I exclaimed, "mother must have made it up with Uncle Louis."

She looked at me for a moment as if stupefied. "Really, for a child of your age you have the most impossible notions. I wonder where you get hold of your strange ideas."

When Uncle Louis was asked for three weeks, he generally stayed three months. It was an understood arrangement. A few days before his arrival an unusual couple came to lunch who fascinated me. The husband was reputed to be a "monster", a fact that made him appear very interesting, since this was after all a distinction not accorded to everyone. He had come that day to try two horses father wanted to sell, and was wearing a pair of well-cut riding-breeches. With his gleaming black eyes, his long nose, and his great height, he did not give a bad impression physically. As the dessert was being passed, he cast a glance at me for no apparent reason which seemed to pierce into my very soul. It frightened me so much that my heart almost stopped. His wife was thin and pale. She had a parting in the middle of her oily hair, and this gave her somehow the appearance of a weeping willow. Without being able to describe why, she created in me an immediate aversion.

After lunch the men went off to the stables, and our guest at once became much more at her ease. The conversation ranged over a multitude of dull topics. Among others, mother made a remark to the lady which I did not quite understand. Blushing, she replied hastily, "My husband does not allow me to put any on."

I think it was a question of face powder. Mother, half-laughing, continued, "It occurs to me that he does not allow you many things."

At this the lady burst into tears. The slippers I was embroidering for Uncle Ballou fell from my hands, while mother sat there open mouthed, having no idea what to say, especially as she was scarcely acquainted with the poor woman, and was only aware that she lived in an old house on the edge of the forest from which she hardly ever stirred.

"Please excuse me for crying like this," she apologized, and she forthwith launched into a long discourse. Her husband made her very miserable, she said, and beat her constantly, without cause.

"I know about it," said mother, having already heard it rumoured by Père Lafûte. "Why don't you return to your family?"

She explained that she had none.

"Well, why not separate?"

"I have no money."

"Ah, it is difficult for you, I see."

"He is also fearfully jealous," the lady continued, and getting up suddenly, she lifted her skirts. "Look at the linen he forces me to wear," and we saw a pair of drawers made from white potato-sacking, tied at the knee with elastic garters. "I am also completely covered with bruises," she cried, and was just going to show us her backside when some steps in the hall brought her luckily to her senses.

The men came in at this moment. The "monster" in an affectionate way observed to his wife that it was time to leave. Smiling at him she nodded her head in a charming agreeable manner. Looking out of the corner of my eye, I watched them, quite stupefied, and unable to comprehend the situation, so suddenly did they seem to be devoted to each other. Then, as he was leaving the room, he passed close beside me, and a second time gave me a look that transfixed me with a thrill of fascinating terror.

"They are curious people," mother exclaimed, when they had left, and she went on to describe to the men what had just taken place.

Uncle Ballou added in a whisper, no doubt so that I should not hear, "They say he is a satyr."

"Miss Hayes, do you know what is a satyr?"

"No," said the poor Englishwoman in consternation, "I don't know what you are talking about, you are confused. Forget about it."

When Uncle Louis arrived at the station, father was there to meet him. It was a distinct change from other years when mother was always on the platform. She received him this time with some reserve at the door of the château. I jumped up and threw my arms around his neck. He extracted from his pockets some chocolates and a diablo set. I was jumping with delight, but father confiscated the chocolates because they were from Marquis, his favourite confectioner. To excuse himself he explained that the candy would be bad for my stomach.

Ballou received Louis with the remark, "Ah, at last the prodigal son has returned. We never expected to see you again."

"Excuse me," said mother biting, "I have always promised you he would come back."

Uncle Louis looked at her coldly without replying. To my surprise, he stayed with us only for the stipulated three weeks. I might mention that he had brought with him this time a slightly reddish beard which immediately inspired a flood of sarcastic comments. When father swore that it made him look like President Loubet, he decided to shave it off.

"It gave me so much trouble to grow," he sighed.

"I suppose you watered it regularly? Fine flowers require water," papa teased.

"Don't be foolish. I pomaded it, of course, and where you find a beard you will always find a woman."

"Yes," laughed father, "and where you find a woman you find the devil."

In his honour father held a Rallye-Paper. As I remember it, the affair was most amusing. Among other things fat Madame Remard, who looked like a coachman, fell into the water-ditch in the Allée Ronde. She emerged muddy, but unhurt, though she screamed like a polecat at the misadventure and gave vent to words not sanctioned by the Académie Française. Father, in his capacity as host, came rushing up to help in the rescue, muttering to himself, "If only she has not been injured where it counts most! The best part of women and fish is in the middle."

The course to be run was about three kilometres and had to be covered at full speed. Part of it lay through the main street of the village, to the delight of the peasants, who leaned out of their windows applauding wildly; then it returned through the park gates leading to the forest and the *Aleée Ronde*. At all the jumps officials were present to see that the obstacles were duly negotiated. Then the prizes were distributed in quantities, with a great amount of hand-kissing for the ladies. Among others there was a prize for Uncle Louis and one also for the fat lady who had swallowed so much mud. Finally two trophies were reserved, one for a very pretty girl, whom the men considered remarkable on account of her deportment, and another for a poor gentleman who split his breeches.

When Uncle Louis was with us, our time was mostly spent in the smoking-room, and this pleased me immensely, as I found the atmosphere there far more congenial than in the formal parts of the house. In the smoking-room we enjoyed a wood fire crackling softly all day long; the family relaxed, the dogs dozed; I worked steadily on the slippers for Uncle Ballou, who was jealous on account of those Uncle Louis had commissioned from me.

"My Petit Coco, make some hearts on mine, as you did for Uncle Louis, and add some doves flying about among my initials," begged Uncle Ballou.

The men, smoking their interminable cigars, continued to discuss horses, as usual. Father, with his back to the fire, his hands clasped behind him, and one leg thrust forward in a forth-right manner after the fashion of a cavalry officer, would remove his monocle and make a little dissertation on a mare which he thought should have won the *Prix de Diane* at Chantilly in 1904.

Uncle Louis, removing his hands from his pockets, so as to give an additional curl to his blond moustache, objected: stating that the mare in question was not ready for the race that day, and that she proved her worth later in the season, beating *Sans Culotte* in a walk, when the going should have favoured the stallion. Ballou had something to say on this subject, and in a positive voice explained that *Sans Culotte* threw a shoe during the race, and without that mischance would have won easily. Mother, in the meantime, was trying to finish some embroidery

on which she had been engaged for years. Propped on a chair in a corner, Bonnie, my Scotch doll, stared at us out of her china eyes with a fixed look of compassion, to which we were, perhaps unwittingly, entitled. Such was a fairly accurate picture of our family life in those times.

A sad circumstance ruined the memory of this room for me. It was there that father had the unfortunate idea to inform me, without warning, that La Borne Blanche had been sold. It was such a shock that I almost fell fainting on the carpet.

Miss Hayes, thoroughly frightened, and trying to calm me, scolded no one in particular, though father must have felt guilty. "I had already warned that she should not be told the news without preparation. It might have killed her."

I stayed in bed for two days, crying, and refusing to speak to my parents. To cheer me up, the dear old maid kept telling me stories about heroines who accepted the saddest fates without complaint. In the end I had to swallow the pill, for better or worse. From then on the conversation seemed to revert to no other subject except the sale.

Uncle Louis, the idiot, remarked, probably because he was now indifferent to the charms of the Department of Oise, "After all I don't blame you. This is a place to get out of; the country is finished and the people boring."

I am wondering if he no longer cared for the singing of the wind in the trees, for the flowers in the garden, for the log of wood burning bright in the great fireplace, and for the thousand other amenities of the château. If he had thought of such matters, he would have realized that nothing could be ended there for him, nor for the others. Indeed, one wonders whether he reflected why, if those people were so tedious, he always derived such pleasure to be with them.

"My family is impossible, Miss Hayes."

"You must never pass judgment on your family, my little girl."

"When they do such things, one can criticize them."

"Darling, it is their house, their life. When you are as old, you will do worse, no doubt."

"Who do you think I am? I have a heart!"

"A heart?" replied the old Englishwoman pensively, "a heart?"

I sometimes question if people of your parents' set have ever had one."

Before we left La Borne Blanche an incident took place that terrified me. One morning when I was leading Vaillante back to her stall, I heard the stable boys talking among themselves as they were forking the straw. One of them said to the other, "When is it that Monsieur le Comte will fight his duel?"

Heavens, what an affair! Is father going to fight a duel? In a frenzy I rushed back to Miss Hayes, at the house.

"Papa is fighting a duel! Papa is fighting a duel!"

"How do you know?"

"I heard the stable boys discussing it."

"Now you must be calm. Don't disturb your father, don't mention it to anyone in the house. There is no danger, as he is a wonderful swordsman, but pray to God with all your strength."

On the fateful day father arrived for lunch looking a little pale, and reported in a grim manner, "It was all over in a minute. That idiot will no doubt avoid being insolent to ladies in the future."

One of our neighbours had conveniently driven over just in time to be invited to stay for the meal. He was greatly interested when he heard what had taken place, and asked how the affair had terminated so quickly.

"The man seemed very nervous," said papa, "though I understand he has done considerable fencing. At any rate, it was the easiest duel imaginable. He lunged with a disengagement, on which I parried tierce and made an immediate direct riposte. The point of my *épée* penetrated his upper arm and went right through. He dropped his weapon and in a moment was bleeding like a pig. I have never seen such a sight. I thought at first that I must have severed the artery, but it was only a large vein. It was extremely simple, as you can see."

For years there had been a general rule that nobody was insulting in the vicinity of father, because everyone round there was aware of his reputation with a sword—he had seventeen duels on his conscience, without a single defeat. When he was young, almost anything would offend him, and he was always fighting. As he grew older, he became a little wiser, but he had been



unable to resist the pleasure of giving a lesson to this disrespectful young newcomer, who had heard too late about the valour of old man Entremont. The fellow had received a fine wound in his arm because for twenty minutes he had chosen not to turn aside out of a dusty lane so as to let Madame la Comtesse d'Entremont pass in her English two-wheeled cart. The wretched man simply got his money's worth, that was all.

The news that we were selling the château spread like wild-fire through the country and provinces. We received every day offers of other properties to purchase. It seemed as if the whole of France were for sale. In Paris we had two old cousins who were a worry and terror to the family. Rain, wind, or thunder we had to receive them. One of them was Cousin Théodore de Bourbonne, to whom I felt that I should be eternally indebted, because, owing to his kind offices, father and mother had first met; the other was his sweetheart, Sophie, "the poor relation" as I had mentally dubbed her. So as to please him, it was necessary to ask the old maid along. These two elderly turtle-doves were unable to let a day pass without seeing each other. At eighty-four he was still fairly green for his age, at sixty she had the appearance of a withered apple. These two by some mischance got wind of our early departure. The old fellow wrote a long letter to express his disapproval of the proposed sale of the house. He concluded, however, "When the wine has been drawn one must know how to drink it," and added that he would like to come and spend two weeks with us in March so as to make up in that way for the visit he would be losing the following September.

What an unmentionable scourge it was to have to suffer once more "Old Onion and Miss Garlic", as we called them. There was no way to escape, however, as the old man had quite a fortune that my family hoped to inherit, though they had to compete for it with some other cousins in Brittany who were also courting him with desperate stratagems.

"There is nothing to do, Antoinette, you will have to write that nanny-goat Sophie, and ask her to come at the same time," said father, sighing.

For myself, I was sad enough to have to leave in May. Now, my parents had to spoil my last days at La Borne Blanche with

those detestable persons. I could not forget that one of them had remarked about me in a pinched manner, "She is like a horse that is out of hand."

"Yes," chimed in the other, "in my time . . ." But I will omit the long discourse which followed on the subject of youth in general.

On the appointed date they arrived. He in an overcoat closely fitted to his waist in the style of a returned immigrant of 1815; she quivering, smelling of vanilla, with white cloth gloves she had changed at the station, and in an old-fashioned cape of bombazine, the whole surmounted by a floppy straw hat. I noticed that as usual there was not a present between them for anyone. It was their custom to appear with empty hands.

"I have brought nothing for you," he announced brazenly; "you will get everything when I die."

Cousin Sophie nodded in confirmation, with an ironic smile which had, no doubt, accompanied the same inanity on the threshold of the cousins in Brittany. They had scarcely got settled when they besought my parents to purchase a property in Poitou. Monsieur de Bourbonne, having been born there, would have enjoyed spending a month in that country each year—it would remind the dear man of his youth, he professed. Something on a river was what he wanted.

"Yes," father growled in his sleeve, "so that he could safely empty his chamber-pot out of the window—a favourite mania of his." It was known that he had been arrested by the police in Paris recently in the midst of this little diversion. He was constrained to pay a fine of five francs at the station for the infraction. As he was leaving the place of detention, he inquired with considerable dignity how much it would cost him by the month.

"Poitou is an admirable country, my dear children. They have good common sense, and are very royalist. Maxence could go into politics," the old cousin went on persuasively.

"Yes, I could do that, and become an object of pity," murmured father half-aloud.

"We will think about it, Cousin Théodore," my parents replied in chorus. They had already reflected on the idea a long time

before, and had decided that they detested the true countryside. Father realized that he knew nothing about agricultural matters, and that it would drive him mad to have to attend one fair after another, in the manner of his father-in law, Montigny.

"Can you see me putting up jam?" mother asked, without getting an answer.

That they would have to be young, much in love, and full of illusions for such rustic joys was an opinion that accorded with the thoughts in both their hearts.

The stables at La Borne Blanche had always been maintained with particular splendour. The gardens were mother's department, with father it was the stables. Everything glistened there, as though in the drawing-room, from the cruppers of the horses to the top hat of the coachman. Now, it was necessary to have a sale, and the affair was of no short duration, since there were twenty-one horses and my pony to dispose of, not to speak of the tack, harness, and carriages. Lady Grey, being too vicious for anyone else, had to be shot. Vaillante was kept for my use in Paris, as well as four other horses for the grown-ups. During the sale our park was invaded by a crowd of buyers who plucked at the tails of the horses, and examined their hoofs, their legs, their coats, and their teeth. Horses were continually being trotted up and down by the stable boys.

"There is not much confidence shown here," said father, wagging his head.

Our neighbour, the satyr, was among those interested. To my profound surprise, he did not recognize me, but seemed only interested in a girl, aged fourteen, a long and thin adolescent, who was trying out various horses on behalf of her father.

People by the dozen arrived and rang the bell of the main gate. They formed an endless chain of friends, come to say good-bye to mother. In her generosity she distributed to everyone some sort of gift, as a souvenir. Privately, this caused father—much less generous than she—a pang of sorrow. Invariably she mollified him, explaining briefly that the objects were of no value and that they were old wedding presents she had never been able to use. The formula succeeded each time in soothing him. Among others an extraordinary-looking gentleman returned three times to bid farewell. He was about sixty years

old and must have been extremely important as mother kept receiving him as though he were of royal blood. Father did no less. The gentleman was stout, with a sensual face that was made up and powdered like a pastel portrait. From his person disengaged a powerful odour of scent. On every occasion, before getting into his phaeton, he bewailed in stately phrases that my parents were going. "So far, far away."

Mother would then reply, "Paris is only fifty kilometres from here, my dear Stani."

"Yes," he answered in a melancholy manner, "it is at the other end of the earth."

The day we had to leave La Borne Blanche, I ran sobbing through the house, kissing the bare walls, and refusing to go. When Tata, in distress, wanted to cook something special for me to eat before departing, I cried out, "No, I prefer to eat my tears."

At the top of the great wooden staircase, contemplating the tragedy with my head between my hands, I vowed that I would some day buy back that beloved property from which I was being torn so cruelly.

In Paris we moved at once into our apartment, the old family establishment in the rue du Général Foy, behind the Church of Saint-Augustin. It was a five-storey building. Grandmother Entremont had lived and died there; my father and uncle had been born in the house. We ourselves were returning to it, since father, who was devoted sentimentally to his birthplace, was able by a lucky chance to get rid of the tenants on the third and fourth floors through the expiration of their leases.

Mother was installed on the lower floor, where she had a bedroom, boudoir and bathroom, a reception hall with black-and-white marble floor, one small and two large drawing-rooms, a library, dining-room, kitchen, and other appurtenances. Father was relegated to the upper floor, reached by a spiral staircase, where he had his own suite and smoking-room. On the same floor I shared a large room with Miss Hayes as well as a playroom, not to speak of the main hall, in which I used to play at ball. A single bathroom had to take care of father, Miss Hayes, and me, besides any friends who might be occupying the three

guest-rooms. It was scarcely a quite adequate arrangement, even though one did not bathe every day. While on the subject of baths, mother, after her trip to England, had brought back some curious ideas, so it seemed, for during many hours at La Borne Blanche I had listened to her discussing the question with father. He maintained that it would cost a small fortune to install a tiled bath with tiled wainscoting, a *bidet*, mirrors, a private toilet, a fireplace with gas logs, and all the other accessories that went with what she had in mind.

"Are you pretending to be Venus in her bath or Gabrielle d'Estrées? Have you already ordered the asses' milk? At your age, my dear, it seems rather ridiculous," father bantered.

"Ridiculous yourself! You who pretend that a women is old at thirty, and only care for little girls in short socks," mother replied, thoroughly piqued.

"Oh, I forgot," said father; "only horses grow old, of course."

When the bathroom was completed, it seemed gorgeous to me, and well worth spending money for something so delightful. It was so different from all the bathrooms we had had before, in which the water was heated by a wood-burning geyser, and the tubs, made of zinc, looked like giant sardine tins. When I got a chance I would go and sit on the cane cover of the toilet, where I assumed a queenly attitude and dreamed of the day when I should also have a bathroom of my own. It must be noted that, though mother had secured the luxury of taps which spouted hot and cold running water into the basin, we on the fourth floor still had to be content with ewers of cold or sometimes hot water.

The decorations of the different suites were elegant, in white-painted woodwork. On the fourth floor the furniture had mostly been brought from La Borne Blanche, and it consoled me greatly to recapture the atmosphere of that beloved house. Below, everything was new to me in mother's apartment. The boudoir, where she dressed, and her bedroom were draped in chintz. An antique walnut dressing-table glistened in one of the rooms. It was covered with a piece of Valenciennes lace on which were decked a toilet set in tortoise-shell inlaid with gold armorial crests, and numerous cut-glass jars and bottles stoppered in gold. Mother's bed, the head and footboards heavily overstuffed in

nasturtium-coloured velvet, harmonized marvellously with the Turkey carpet and the upholstery.

The curtains in the living-room were scarlet, and the furniture was in natural wood or ancient gilt. A huge, crystal chandelier rather overwhelmed the main reception room, where once more were to be admired the ancestral portraits and the cabinets of bric-à-brac from La Borne Blanche. A fascinating clock decorated the mantelpiece. It represented a fountain. When the hour struck, a cascade of water, simulated in crystal, marked the circumstance. In the boudoir I discovered how fragile were the so-called "period" chairs. I was forbidden to make use of any except a tapestry ottoman, as my habit of teetering on chairs was already well known. Our servants remained the same, only the stablemen had departed, but we kept our faithful coachman, Rigobert.

At the beginning of August my parents went to Marienbad—father to get thin. Mother, in spite of her loathing for the place, decided she required the purges of that purgatory to recover from the fatigues of house-moving. I was sent with Miss Hayes to St. Valery-sur-Somme, where Uncle Ballou lived with his aged mother. For the first time in my life I came face to face with a truly rustic mode of existence. It staggered me. I could not understand how my refined Uncle Ballou had been born in that simple house on the quays, where there was only one maid, wearing slippers without heels, and Justin, an old manservant whose stained side-whiskers looked horribly moth-eaten. "Old Mother Ballou", as in private I called her disrespectfully, was likewise unimposing. Sitting interminably in a worn, green velvet armchair, she spent her time crocheting beside a window shaded by a Venetian blind. On each side of the sill small mirrors were fixed at an angle, so as to enable her to observe surreptitiously every episode that took place outdoors in the lives of her neighbours. With a tight lace cap on her head, she resembled, like two peas in a pod, the grandmother of Little Red Riding Hood.

The rooms in the house were furnished without style, and with a multitude of tassels in red plush and black leather. On the walls hung portraits of ancestors, apparently very annoyed and extremely notarial. One of these gentlemen followed me

with his eyes wherever I went with a glance that was severe and even angry. The room we were given was in mahogany. In my little iron bed, Miss Hayes said I looked like Napoleon at St. Helena. I thought that in her large one she resembled Queen Victoria—our ideas were obviously concerned with great personages. We slept beneath eiderdowns, which seemed provincial, and at night when it rained, Camille, the maid, passed a hot bedpan between our sheets to dispel the damp. On the table, where I was supposed to do some holiday tasks, there was an embroidered cover representing a man in hunting costume, followed by his wife and dog, all of them just leaving church. What worried me was how he had managed during Mass to dispose of a gun he carried slung over his shoulder.

During our stay Miss Hayes abandoned the habit of putting curling-pins in my hair before retiring. It was strange, but the change upset my sleep because I had become so accustomed to the ritual. Instead, my curls were replaced with two long pig-tails on which I was always seeking to sit down, and never quite succeeding, since the old lady assured me that such treatment would make them grow to the floor. As soon as it was dusk, a few smoking oil lamps were lit, and some candles that cast weird shadows on us all. Without much delay I was thereupon bundled off to bed.

Unexpectedly, Uncle Ballou came to join us. He was always in a rush, accepting any invitation he received—no matter how short the notice. St. Valery was in fact too solemn a spot to hold him. He had scarcely arrived when he exclaimed, "My little Coco, we are going fishing tomorrow. Coffee and rolls at seven o'clock sharp."

I cried out "*Chic alors!*" At which Miss Hayes, frowned, not appreciating the slang term. I made up my mind to wear my beautiful new swimming-suit. That night on the terrace I saw far off a little glimpse of a sea that seemed full of defiance. The bay of the Somme appeared to be a green leaf on which the sun was sitting like a ripe raspberry. The sea has gone away so far that it will never return, I thought. Out loud I complained, "Uncle Ballou is mad, the sea won't come back and there will no fishing."

"Yes, it will come back slyly, during our sleep," said Miss Hayes, who was always right.

Sure enough, the next morning the sea was there, having over-run a sandy beach stretching to a distance of twenty kilometres. Silently and swiftly the tide had rolled in and was now lopping against the quays with a relentless *flic . . . flac*. In an ancient vehicle we piled together as best we could, while the old white horse gently bestirred himself. I watched my uncle and thought how astonishing it was that he remained so young among such aged people, and in surroundings where everything appeared old, if not positively antique. After a longish drive we reached the end of the world. On bare dunes a few small cabins, preserved by many coats of tar, were the only signs that man had penetrated into this empty waste. Before us a desert, robbed of its golden tones by the steaming mists of the day, stretched out to a limitless bourn. Some natives, looking like wet seals, were gathering fish into a net stretched across a pond of salt water left behind by the neglectful tide. In this small finger of the sea, grey shrimps, soles, and shellfish teemed in uncomfortable confusion. Uncle and I, under the delighted eye of my governess, entered the water. I had never bathed before except in a tub. It seemed like paradise to me to splash about in the midst of small wavelets and hot sand. Miss Hayes called out to me a hundred times in fear that I would catch cold.

Uncle Ballou shouted back, "Don't worry, Mademoiselle, this will kill off her fleas. Poor little Coco has been brought up in cotton wool. It will toughen her up."

A large crab seized my toe and sent me screaming out of the water in a hurry. Then we went to assist the fishermen, who greeted my uncle very politely, "Hello! Good morning, Monsieur Alphonse, we did not know you were back."

On the sand, before we left, I saw more fish being spilled out of the nets than I had thought the sea contained. At dinner that evening I devoured a part of our catch with such a ferocious appetite as not to notice—and this surprised Miss Hayes—that there was too much pepper in the potato salad. Pepper usually upset me because it was employed liberally as a moth preventive, and I had sometimes sniffed more than I liked by mistake.

Uncle Ballou took me several times to the seaside, to the

village, and particularly to the grocery store, where a whole new world was revealed to me. I had never entered such a place before. At Orry-la-Ville I knew Madame Dufour, the proprietress of the grocery, who greeted me respectfully from her doorstep; but I was not permitted to venture into her establishment. One can imagine what such a shop would represent to a little girl. It was filled with English sweets, with licorice, with biscuits so much more desirable than at the *pâtisserie*, where everything was displayed for inspection without any mystery about it. At this place I discovered a box filled with *bouchées au chocolat* next door to the beach shoes, while on the other side were set out—temptingly—a row of *nonnettes* that made my mouth water.

My uncle was soon off to other pastures, after leaving many instructions for our comfort to Justin, the manservant. I was reduced to playing in the garden with my Scotch doll, or reading in the veranda, *The Memoirs of an Ass*, by la Comtesse de Ségur. Miss Hayes, in the English fashion, adored long walks and took me out when the days were fine to explore the old sea wall from which we could admire the distant ocean and the mauve-coloured dunes. Sometimes we would sit on the sand: she under a parasol; while I leaning back watched the changing mystery of the clouds, or ran barefoot, pigtails in the wind, following Cora as she barked and chased the sandpipers in a futile but always hopeful pursuit. Other children were also paddling around us, but I did not join them, as "One never knows"—so said my governess with conscientious precaution—"who they might be or from where they come." An elderly lady intrigued me immensely. She bathed every day, no matter what the weather, in a voluminous black dress with long gloves and stockings to match. She was reputed to be eighty years old, and was seeking to retain her youth in this fashion.

At the end of my holidays I was the colour of a cigar, to the delight of my parents, who declared that I looked in fine condition and well-muscled.

"Where there is sunshine, no doctor is needed," Miss Hayes declared with considerable sagacity.

They also appeared in excellent health, and seemed charmed, for once, with their stay in Austria. They had been presented, I was told, to the Duke d'Orléans, who had invited them to

dinner on several occasions. Afterwards they had spent four weeks at Dinard with the English lord and his wife. They related a thousand tales concerning all those they had seen, among others about an old American lady, proud of her descent from Pocahontas, who specialized in entertaining royal persons. For anyone in the simple nobility to get an invitation from her was quite a feat. The complex procedure needed to secure entrance to her household involved first meeting André de Fouquières, who acted as her social master of ceremonies. He was reputed to be the arbiter of elegance, and on her behalf pulled the strings to make those fashionable puppets perform their allotted stunts. Finally, father and mother had been to Sologne for the opening of the shooting season, where papa was congratulated for several fine kills which perhaps should have been credited to the neighbouring gun.

Our life once more resumed its smooth and steady course. My teeth required inspection. The dentist was a Russian—he looked like a nihilist. To Miss Hayes he gave a note for my parents recommending that I should have an apparatus applied at once to straighten my teeth. Mother looked at my mouth in some surprise and declared that the Russian was completely mad. It was true my teeth were slightly crooked, but they had been that way in our family for generations—why change the tradition?

Shortly a school was chosen for me, in the rue de Madrid, where three times a week I met a bevy of little girls who terrified me. As I had never been in such surroundings, the Dieter School proved difficult, not only because of the studies required, but also because I found my companions hard to get along with on account of their seemingly precocious knowledge of the world. One of them arrived each day in her own automobile. My parents had already been talking of buying a car, and this was not remarkable among people who could afford luxuries. But that a little brat no older than I should have her own car was something to make me think twice.

When we needed to drive anywhere, Miss Hayes ordered a cab. It had to crawl reluctantly and with staggering hoofbeats up the slight slope of the rue du Général Foy to fetch us, for we did not even have mother's carriage at our disposal. I must say

her carriage was none too remarkable in any case, simply a one-horse brougham that smelled rather stuffy.

All the same the automobile of the little schoolgirl lost some importance in my estimation when they told me at home, in a disdainful manner, that she was one of the "new rich".

If I thought I had seen many guests at La Borne Blanche, I soon realized I had seen nothing. In Paris it seemed my parents knew everyone on earth. For mother's "day" there was sure to be an immense crowd, and then besides there were endless lunches and dinners. At noon intimate friends of the family generally appeared, or acquaintances from Chantilly who had come to watch the races at Longchamps or elsewhere. This last was a complication sufficient to upset all the routine of the house, and involved lunching at twelve instead of at quarter-past one.

The large dinner parties were affairs in quite a different category. Everything had to be planned with the greatest care. Mother sent out invitations to fifty persons, four weeks in advance, in the hope of ending up with a table of thirty-two. It was a gamble of the most nerve-racking kind. She lost something like three pounds in weight while the acceptances and regrets trickled in slowly and tantalizingly. If things turned out well, she would find a few days before the dinner that she had the thirty-two she needed, or that she was short. For such emergencies she had a few devoted couples in reserve, whom she could summon to fill in without apologies. If by some horrible quirk of fate she got more than thirty-two, it was then necessary to make the number up to thirty-six, forty, or some other magic figure. In any case there had to be one man for each woman. It would have been inexcusable to complete the table with an extra man. But this question of getting the right number was only a minor worry. In a black notebook she listed whether, and if so when, and with what other persons, the intended guests had previously been invited. Other details described what they had eaten and what wines they had been served before. I believe even the flower decorations of the table were also exactly described in this meticulous booklet. Every detail had to be different, or there was a risk of being considered unimaginative. Maman in her methodical manner left

nothing to chance, and this was the more praiseworthy since she had no previous experience to guide her.

Such affairs were extremely expensive, but mother did not know what economy was. The question of money had never occurred to her. In this respect she had been spoiled. Money troubles were questions discussed by other people, and did not affect her personally. She had other vexations, of course, not the least being the large dinners at which, even when everything had been forsaken, there was still the possibility of making mistakes. It was so easy, for instance, to ask people who did not go well together; the dishes could turn out failures; something might be overflavoured with onion, or the menu might contain too much meat or too many white sauces; a wine could prove corked; the general conversation might veer to topics that lacked propriety, or, still worse, relapse into appalling silences. In spite of all these agonies such affairs had to be undertaken regularly, and the moment one had been concluded plans were begun for the next. I imagine, however, that mother really enjoyed these battles of the social world, where against fearful odds she staked all her strategy and tactics to win a victory that meant very little in the end.

Family dinners, devoted to our various relatives, took place rarely, but at these I met a number of people, hitherto unknown, who had not had the honour of being invited to La Borne Blanche. In Paris it was apparently impossible to avoid them. Generally that sort of dinner was given twice a year; one was arranged in the autumn, before the departure of the Sosthène d'Entremonts to Egypt, the other took place in the spring when they had returned. Cousin Cathy and I were present automatically. Before the guests arrived, I would hurry down to admire the table, and to look among the place-cards to see the names of the bores we would have to endure that evening. Mother would never satisfy my curiosity on such occasions. If I dared to inquire who were the guests, she would reply, "If anyone asks you, say you have no idea." This was not enlightening, and in fact quite irritating.

These tedious love-feasts seemed as though they would never end. One would swear that everyone took a malicious pleasure in refusing to leave until the hosts were exhausted. When the

last was gone, my parents would collapse on their chairs, father exclaiming, "Our families are too numerous, they are really a scourge. You can choose your friends, but Fate decides on your relations. The ambassador was more stupid than ever this time. Luckily he never opens his mouth or France would surely undergo fire and sword. Old Aunt Eugénie almost died of apoplexy when her daughter-in-law remarked to her, acidly, that she did not know how to raise children."

"Yes," mother interjected, "and your Cousin Eglantine repeated to me under a bond of secrecy that the general had said—no doubt so as to shock her to death—that he always had a pretty Fatma at his disposal when he was commanding in Algeria. You can imagine how he scandalized the poor dear. I believe, in fact, that she and her husband have never consummated their union."

Sometimes we invited two cousins "to ginger up the sauce", as father put it. They were a married couple of the same age as my parents, and were both attractive and elegant. The wife was a great friend of mother, and was always referred to as "the beautiful Hélène of Troy". Father was less enthusiastic about the husband, "handsome Georges", a bluffer and boaster, quite outstanding in that line. To tell the truth, he could kill off any audience in short order, and father complained bitterly when he was thus victimized.

"That fearful Georges," he said chokingly, "has seen everything, heard everything, and according to his story can poke his finger into the navel of any duke in France, he knows them so well. Not only that, but he is the stupidest man I ever saw."

"Oh, Maxence, don't be so disagreeable, I adore Hélène," mother protested.

"Well, you can have his wife. As a beautiful animal, she is beautiful, but she is none too clever, either, you know."

At which mother replied, laughing: "I must admit she swallows much that is green and unripe, the poor woman. When her husband told her that he spent his days in the Bois sitting on a bench so as to breathe the fresh air, I asked: does he go there when it rains? 'Yes, even then,' she answered, and the foolish girl went on, 'I fear he will catch a chill don't you think I am right, Antoinette?'"

At these family dinners the children, consisting of Cathy, another small cousin as pale as linen, and I remained silent at one end of the table. Alone, under the envious eye of the others, I was allowed a finger of champagne and the right to stuff myself with whatever I chose—even *pâté de foie gras*. The menu, as always at our house, was choice.

Father would remark to his cousins, "Do you remember the dinners mother used to give, with *double service*, and a sherbet in the middle? Those affairs went on for hours."

I thought to myself: Heavens, if he does not think these dinners long enough, he must be numb, poor papa.

I must say that our house functioned in an admirable manner. The great dinners went off without effort. Our servants appeared to know the routine like their alphabet, and there seemed to be no hitch at all. It must be remarked, furthermore, that nothing in the house or in our way of life was finicky or overdone in those days. In the homes of the middle class one saw, indeed, a fussiness that had not yet graduated from Victorian times. A favourite foible, for instance, required pink satin bows, delicately knotted in the midst of a vase of imitation flowers. Mother would have died laughing if she had found any such affectation in the house of a friend. Though gentlemen always inquired if they were permitted to smoke, the question of how they disposed of their cigar ash was never a consideration. If it fell on the carpet, nobody cared. A servant would sweep it up in due course. A lady who ventured into the kitchen, or who interested herself in the perfection of pastry cake, would have been ridiculed by everyone.

About the time that my young brother went to Switzerland with Brigitte, mother—upset by the constant quarrels in the servants' quarters—sent for Adrien and Tata. In a dry and decisive voice she declared that they would be discharged without notice at the next dispute among the help. "Life is too short for me to have to concern myself with such stupid affairs," she remarked severely. "You can take it or leave it. I have a high regard for both of you, but I must not be disturbed again."

"A good house and good masters do not separate that way, Madame la Comtesse. We will do everything in our power to

satisfy you," the couple assured her. From that day there was no further trouble downstairs.

Since our removal to Paris, mother no longer got her clothes from small dressmakers. Cardboard boxes labelled Worth, Paquin, and Doucet arrived frequently at the house. From these packages were withdrawn beautiful creations, spangled with midnight blue, green, or silver sequins. My eyes started from my head as I watched these wonders being unfolded amid a crinkling sheaf of tissue paper. I would try on mother's hats with all their array of feathers. They made me look like Bonaparte, as First Consul.

At each new outfit father would give way to a little whistle of approving admiration, meaning, "Good Lord, you have a pretty dress!"

As she paid all the bills herself, without ever asking a penny of him, they all appeared ravishing in his opinion. For her afternoon clothes she was more economical, patronizing less expensive houses. This did not prevent her, however, from being exquisitely dressed. She was always neat as two pins, as if she had herself just come out of a box. In town she wore white kid gloves and a bouquet of violets to relieve her rather quiet ensembles. At night her gloves were in suède. We would watch her leave the house, with a tiara of pearls and diamonds in her hair, wrapped in a magnificent chinchilla cloak. She was thrilled each time, no doubt, at being a beautiful woman and at the opportunity of displaying herself.

Frequently after lunch, or at teatime, I would be summoned to the drawing-room so as to be presented to people I did not know or had met hardly at all. Miss Hayes would comb my fringe and curl my hair for such occasions, and would then inspect my nails, my knees, and my face. At last she gave me a little pat to signify that everything was all right and that I could go. Without pleasure I set out for the drawing-room where I found strange faces smiling at me amiably as I curtsied to them.

"How she has grown," they would murmur. "She looks like Maxence. Where does she go to school?"

Then, almost as suddenly as their interest had been awakened, I would find myself completely neglected. Hurrying over to

mother, I asked if I could leave. The annoyance of these introductions was that people recognized me everywhere: in the street, in the Parc Monceau, on the staircase; and sometimes I had to stop to curtsy and speak with them politely without dancing about from one leg to the other.

"Yes," I would say, "mother is well, thank you. Father is exhibiting some horses at the show."

It was much less tedious when they said to Miss Hayes, "I think she will be pretty." But that did not happen often enough to suit me.

When I saw them in the distance, I would call out, "Quick, Miss Hayes, let us escape, here comes So-and-So."

My daily trip to the Parc Monceau took place after my study course. I rolled my hoop among the legs of the passers-by, while at the same time sucking a stick of sugar candy flavoured with aniseed. On rainy days we walked in melancholy fashion beneath an umbrella. It was then that I envied the little new-rich girl who did not have to get as wet as a water-spaniel. Another rich person intrigued me. Someone had told me, as he drove by in his brougham, almost hidden behind an immense white beard, that it was Monsieur Chauchard, "the richest man in the world". Every time he passed in his carriage, with a huge coachman and a small groom on the driving-seat, I imagined to myself what he would give me if I were his little girl. If it were an automobile, people would call me "new-rich"; if it were a rope of pearls as large as hazelnuts—but little girls don't wear pearls before they marry; suppose it were a sack of gold! What a wonderful idea! A great sack of gold, and I promptly started building a castle in Spain. I would give Tata a farm, some pocket-money to Miss Hayes, and as for me, I denied myself no kind of luxury.

Diabolo was my favourite game, to the regret of Miss Hayes, who seemed scarcely to appreciate it from the day that the diabolo unluckily fell on her foot. Thereafter she was always urging me to play at rope-skipping, which she claimed was less dangerous.

After a long consultation with mother, it was decided that I must be prepared for my first communion—an idea that filled me with fear and worry. I was frightened because I was afraid

of religious mysteries, and I was worried because I found *la grande messe* was a long enough affair to remain kneeling, without additional devotions.

At Orry-la-Ville I had learned a little of the catechism, but not sufficient to appear brilliant at the Convent of the Ascension where I was sent after Easter. It was farther away than the Cours Dieter, but mother said it contained a much better class of girls. She had discovered with the help of my governess that the Dieter place was a hang-out for the daughters of dentists—in fact for people who did not exist. To go to the new school we took a bus as far as l'Etoile. Entering hurriedly I started up the little stairway that led to the open upper deck of the vehicle. Miss Hayes tried, without success, to hold me back by my legs, but she had to give up on account of my kicking in every direction, to the danger of her hat. Furiously, and against her will, she decided to climb up after me, puffing and out of breath. In my ear she whispered, "What a naughty child you are!" She had great trouble from then on trying to keep me from leaning too far over the guard rail when the bad behaviour of the occupants in passing fiacres came to my attention.

Three times a week I went to this school to study as a day pupil. After leaving my work, I watched the young boarders rushing from their classes to a park surrounded by high walls. I would have liked to be amongst them, but it might have put Miss Hayes' position in danger. At home it seemed that father, who had lately been seeking economies, might have thought if he paid the convent it would no longer be necessary to keep a governess. It was a situation I did not like to contemplate. Who could have taken the place in my life of that big, virginal ball-of-fat rolling behind me all day long? Who would tuck me in after I had said my prayers at night, and who would kiss me before I went to sleep? Without her the world would seem insecure, menacing, and a void where no tenderness existed. When mother said sometimes that I was ugly, Miss Hayes, looking at me while she rolled my curls, would say, smiling, "You are not so hideous after all."

If my lessons bothered me she encouraged me to think a little bit with my head, instead of with my feet, which were always dancing about. "Simone, don't eat so much candy," she would

beg; "you would not like to be as fat as I. You remember, I suppose, how you refused to let me be in that photograph the other day because you said I was too big to fit into the picture beside you?"

"I was naughty, Miss Hayes. Now I think you are the loveliest woman in the world," and I cuddled her affectionately.

"Economies" was entirely a new word among us. Our family conversation never concerned money, but recently father would exclaim, "We must economize." Since our arrival in Paris, he found time hanging on his hands, and he had taken to considering the expenses of the household. Everything now appeared exorbitant to him. "Nothing is so expensive as leisure," he confessed.

All the same, I had often seen him sitting at his desk, paying his bills as soon as they were presented. He always replied to mother, when she suggested it was not necessary to pay so quickly, or if she asked where was the fire, "My beautiful child, he who pays his debts gets rich. Not only that, but you know well I am afraid of debts like the plague."

In town, father went riding every morning, no matter what the weather. Twice a week I accompanied him. The horses were waiting for us near the restaurant d'Armenonville beneath a covered wooden construction, called "Le Champignon". We were away at a gallop. As we passed along the Avenue des Acacias, we always met the same people. Sometimes I would see Cousin Cathy, overdressed and garlanded with flowers, in her electric coupé. Leaning out of the window, she shouted affectionate greetings to me, while Miss Daley waved her handkerchief with a slow, pensive motion.

Father remarked, with a laugh, at these encounters, "Cathy does not like riding with us."

"No, she says you make her ride like a fiend and that it rubs her thighs."

At midday we returned sweating. I undressed rapidly. As soon as father had finished with the bathroom, he would call out, "I am back from the mountain!"

Then I would hustle there and managed to appear at one o'clock sharp, steaming from the hot water and smelling of soap. In our household if not on time you could not join the party.

When anyone failed to arrive at the appointed hour, father, glancing at his fob-watch, remarked nervously, "A slap in the face or to be fifteen minutes late are circumstances that develop the muscles of anger."

After lunch, which for him consisted of a slice of ham and a cup of coffee he spent an hour either stretched in an armchair reading the paper, or engaged in correspondence, or else working meticulously at his accounts. About half-past three, having been brushed from head to foot, as though he had passed through a dust storm, he kissed mother's hand affectionately. It was the signal that he was leaving. In formal manner he wore a bowler hat with an exceedingly curly brim; his overcoat showed that he was afraid of catching cold. If he were going to the races or a horse show, the coat was of pale tan box-cloth. If such were not his mission, he had a pencilled list in his pocket of what he must do. With a twirl of his cane he disappeared down the street, on foot in fine weather, or in a cab if it rained—the family carriage being always requisitioned by mother. God knows where he was off to with those hurried footsteps that had a special noise of their own like no one else's. Possibly the little clippity-clop he made was due to his pale biege spats, without which he never left the house—even in the most scorching days of summer. Perhaps on such an occasion he was going to his shirtmaker's to see whether there was any new piqué material available; but he would surely end up at his club, after stopping on the way to chat with a friend, or to visit with some pretty woman to whom he happened to be devoted at the moment.

During the winter months the family went away to hunt, either in Ile de France or in Nivernais, where they had friends who were masters of hounds. They took their horses with them and rented others besides from "La Mère" Henseman, who handled hirelings. In the spring father and Uncle Ballou went often to the races, which they adored, while mother only appeared for the great occasions when she could show off a dress in the paddock, or in the special section reserved for members of a prominent club.

Something happened about that time which seemed to me inconceivable. I was amusing myself playing in the hall, and

without being aware of the fact I began humming the *Marseillaise*. Suddenly I saw the door of the smoking-room open and father, emerging red with fury, gave me a resounding slap. I stood there in a stupefaction that quickly changed to tears and wounded anger. No one in my life had ever struck me before, and this seemed to me an offence against all the laws and principles of my upbringing. In any case the blow was quite incomprehensible to me. Mother, hearing my sobs, appeared and asked why I was squalling like an infant.

"Father has struck me for no reason," I howled.

"Whatever has nettled him? The dear man."

"Did you not hear Simone singing the *Marseillaise*?" said father, still thoroughly annoyed. "It's a song of assassins and murderers. No one in my family or in my house can sing it without getting a broken head. I think I have made that quite clear," he concluded, and, glancing at me harshly, he returned to his room, banging the door behind him.

This was the only blow I ever received from my parents, and it sufficed for a long time to cure me of my taste for that revolutionary song.

Entering the house late one afternoon, papa noticed the charming curve of mother's neck, lighted by a shaft of light from the setting sun, and remarked bluntly that he wanted to have her portrait painted before she became an old woman. "You are like a fine tree in full bloom," he said.

Hastily she got up, and with a pretty sound of rustling taffeta ran to look at herself in a mirror. Reassured at seeing the fresh and healthy glow of her beauty in the reflected image, she exclaimed, "Houf, you frightened me. I thought for an instant that you had observed a crow's-foot."

"Heavens, no, little silly," papa laughed. "You are not yet an old camel. That is why I want to have you painted in all your glory. You have never looked so lovely."

For days they were consulting on this subject. Father had always been interested in painting and professed to be an authority. He began searching through the shops of dealers and in picture galleries to find the right artist. Helleu was considered, but his work was just beginning to lose its fashionable appeal.

"I have seen enough of him," said mother, with a scornful little pout.

Then there was also La Grandara, Chabas, Etcheverry, Lazslô, and Boldini.

"Boldini!" mother cried. "I want Boldini! I adore Boldini. He always makes your legs appear long."

At this name father, in despair, groaned. "For the love of eternal grace! That is not painting! You are allowing yourself to be deceived by a false reputation."

But there was nothing to be done about it. She stuck to her decision, and she got Boldini, from whose palette she emerged like floss silk, haughty and angular, wrapped in bottle-green satin, and sitting crosswise on a couch along which rippled a rope of pearls as large as walnuts.

Papa did not hide his opinion that her picture reminded him of an angry soused-herring; mother, for her part, was quite indifferent to her husband's criticism, and never ceased flinging compliments at the artist. She admitted, however, that he was uglier than a monkey, even if he knew better than anyone how to give the stylish, new, and coquettishly snaky line to his subjects.

In May of that year, Cathy d'Entremont entertained her friends on three successive Sundays at a small dance. I was invited, of course. Before starting for the first of them, I spent a long time in front of a mirror. My hair had been done differently for the occasion. Because of my high forehead they had kept my fringe as usual, but my curls had been replaced with two pigtails that were curled over my ears like macaroons, and were held there by tortoise-shell pins. I thought the effect extremely elegant and flattered myself that I would be mistaken for a woman of at last fifteen. These hops were tremendously amusing to my mind. The making-up of the list from which the young persons were invited seemed, however, to have been done at random.

While I was stuffing myself with *petits fours* and *café Viennois*, one of the little girls confided to me—without appearing much affected by the circumstance—that she was a cousin of the Virgin Mary. I was thunderstruck by this revelation and stood there staring at her with my mouth open.

"It is really very convenient," she went on, delighted by my rapt expression. "When I go to church I do not have to make a genuflection before the Christ Child; you understand that such salutations are not required among members of the family."

Really it was impressive to become acquainted with a niece of *le bon Dieu*. I began to wonder if she could be a help to me for my first communion. As I had forgotten her name, just before leaving I rushed back to her. She was Anne-Marie de Lévis.

"Her father is also a duke and peer of France," father informed me, when I told him of this extraordinary encounter; but he added, "In my opinion the claims of a cousin to close relationship expire with the fourth generation."

As I did not understand his thesis, he went on to explain that a certain Monsieur Chatux professed that he was a cousin of ours. It was ridiculous since the connection dated back to the year 1802.

"What are you talking about?" said mother mockingly. "You refuse to accept your relationship to poor Monsieur Chatux because you consider him a nobody; but you don't forget that the Noimarts and the d'Olans are related to you. Heaven knows, all the same, how distant is the link, and how it goes back to the beginning of time."

At the last of these Sunday hops I was introduced to a young boy, Gérard de Pont-Leroy, who was three or four years older than I, and whom I had previously observed on the staircase of our own building. My heart jumped a little when I met him, as I had already decided that he was as beautiful as the dawn. His sister Elizabeth was with him. She was a tall, awkward sixteen-year-old with an affected manner.

"Do you care to dance?" Gérard asked me. In despair I had to refuse, as I knew nothing of the art; my parents, for some extraordinary reason, had neglected to have me taught. He then asked me, "How old are you?"

"Fourteen," I said, without a quiver.

"You are terribly small for your age," he grinned cheekily, but he was not so stupid, after all, since I was only twelve.

As we were leaving, the niece of the Holy Virgin asked me to a party she was giving three weeks later. I rushed to Miss

Hayes to demand some dancing lessons immediately, so that I would be able to accept the invitations of the handsome young boys at that august entertainment.

"Of course, you will have some at once, darling," my guardian angel promised me, understanding my predicament.

On the staircase of our building young Gérard passed us and promised faithfully that he would call to see me soon. "I will come one of these days; but don't tell the family," he added in a whisper.

The remark left me in perplexity. What did he try to convey by these mysterious words? My family always knew everything. But there are many strange things in this world, I concluded philosophically. Three days later the second man came to announce Gérard. It was half-past four. I had just returned home and was about to have my *gouter*. Miss Hayes wanted to send him away.

"Don't do that!" I cried in a fury.

"How about your lessons?"

"I will do them quicker, that's all. Hardly anyone comes to see me. Let him join us for a while."

He came in, had a good meal, and afterwards we played at dominoes.

"How are you able to leave your homework?" my governess asked him curiously.

He explained that he was at the Jesuit School in the rue de Madrid until four o'clock, then he returned to study at home.

We became great friends subsequently. Little by little he confided in me, between our encounters in various *petits jeux* at which he was expert. He teased me concerning my habit of dreaming. If I took on a vague expression, looking at the clouds with my mind otherwise engaged, he would recite a quatrain:

Où vas-tu nuage?
Je ne sais, enfant,
Je fais mon voyage
Comme il plaît au vent.

From time to time he would again urge me not to mention these visits to his sister who, it seemed, was a first-class spy and

reported everything to his mother. "My life has changed a lot since I met you," he observed. "You are so sweet. Nobody is nervous here. The servants are not being constantly discharged. I detest my mother," he finally admitted one day, his face pale and distorted with emotion. When he left, I reflected on his remark and was horrified.

He detested his mother! But nobody "detested" one's mother. That was not done. Miss Hayes and father had long ago explained to me that one never criticizes the family, one accepts them correctly, without complaint. No doubt Gérard was unhappy. His face was sad, and he had a gloomy expression as he sat there munching sandwiches. I wondered if they beat him. It was impossible to know the truth in such an affair. In my perplexity I thought of Tata, who heard every rumour in the neighbourhood. She should have an opinion on the subject. From the pantry I saw her in the kitchen bending over her stove in the course of preparing a bisque of crayfish.

"Tell me, Tata," I called out, "what do you know about Madame de Pont-Leroy, the lady on the second floor?"

"You mean 'The Cream of the Crop', Mademoiselle Simone? I can tell you some fine ones about that horror, but tonight I have no time, the missus has fourteen people to dinner."

At an early hour the next morning, I whistled down the speaking-tube for my breakfast, which the old woman brought up to me on a tray. While, against all the behests of Miss Hayes, I was dipping slices of bread-and-butter in my coffee, the old woman dispensed to me dozens of tales about "The Cream of the Crop", as the mother of my young friend was known in the servants' quarters. She appeared to be hated and hateful, as well as ugly and pretentious. Nobody was willing to remain in her service, because she was so hard and miserly. It seemed she even counted up how many potatoes there were in the bin. The more Tata talked, the more my imagination flew before her. I could see the lady flogging her trembling and terrified servants as if they were serfs of the Middle Ages.

"As for her children," went on Tata, "they have nothing to eat, the poor darlings. Your little friend, Gérard, has the thighs of a cricket; and look at his sister, she is as thin as a pancake with her stomach sticking out like a famine victim. Those kids

are simply dying from lack of food," the old cook assured me.

This attitude of their mother did not accord very well with the glories of her ancestors, of which she was always boasting at every opportunity. "Yes," Tata sneered, "the lady is simply a snob, who only thinks of associating with dukes and princes. Surely she does not realize that her son has been to call on us. Counts are not sufficiently aristocratic for such a stupid and pretentious person." The old cook having for a long time curbed her indignation now let it have full rein, and galloped her feelings across a fenceless prairie of invective. "He is a really nice boy, your little friend," she went on; "all the servants adore and pity him. He looks like his father, who a year and a half ago was content to die without a struggle. They say the poor gentleman welcomed death after living with such a camel."

I could no longer blame Gérard. What he had been forced to endure would be enough to make him detest anyone, and his mother in particular. I felt he was specially justified when I heard how she strode up and down the apartment with her hair in curling-pins, insulting and beating her children. She was a shrew, I decided. Later on, when we got to know Gérard better and he began talking about his cousins in the *Gotha*, I remarked to Miss Hayes behind his back, "He is wrong, with such a mother he really means 'gutter' and not *Gotha*."

"Simone, you must not be cattish," my old governess reproved me, without displaying much conviction.

My brother, Jean-Marie, who had been nearly forgotten by the family, arrived in June to spend a month with us. It was the only time of year when the doctor allowed him to come down from the mountains. He had changed a lot. He was fat and pink, and had become a regular Swiss peasant. In the house he gave orders to everyone.

Father was somewhat annoyed by this development, and complained that the boy was badly brought up. All the same, in his honour a children's party was given on the first Sunday after his return at which he crammed himself with quantities of cakes and spoke to no one. I was flabbergasted and astonished, as he was without doubt the darling of all the little girls. Charming to look at in his white sailor suit with an open "V"



neck and his first long trousers, he kept to himself and to a sustained assault on the confectionery. One of his admirers, overcome by his large grey-blue eyes, tried to soften his reserve with an amiable remark in the midst of the romantic confusion of a potato race.

Giving her a violent shove he shouted, "Get away, fatty, and shut your trap, or I'll jump into it!"

It had an unfortunate effect. As they left, this society of small persons murmured among themselves: Simone's brother is a boor. She is much nicer than he. It was not a great compliment, since I hardly qualified as an angel.

My friends from the second floor came to our party, after the Comtesse de Pont-Leroy had stopped Miss Hayes in the portecochère, to inform herself regarding the names of the other children who had been invited. The list, recited in a single breath, must have been sufficiently imposing since Gérard and his sister, Elizabeth, arrived well ahead of time. He looked simply splendid in his Eton suit, but paid no attention to me as the other girls settled on him like flies on a lump of sugar. Finally, to conclude this festive afternoon, a large and flashy lady sat down at the piano and kept on playing the popular waltzes, polkas, and one-steps until seven in the evening. She never stopped once, except for a moment to mop her brow, to gulp down an orangeade, or bolt a sandwich.

I had taken three dancing lessons since my first experience of these affairs at Cathy's hop, and already considered myself a brilliant performer. It seemed to me that Gérard was foolish not to be much interested in an elegant person like me, dressed in brand-new clothes, with my hair up, and dancing in a ravishing manner.

As far as my brother was concerned, the occasion had not proved of great interest. The food had been good, but the hot chocolate with whipped cream and the black cherry jam of Switzerland were perhaps better, and he had been allowed to eat these delights in practically limitless quantities.

In a day or two he was asking, with more and more insistence, "When can I go back to Vevey?"

"Very soon," said Brigitte, who was not in such a hurry to leave.

"Why cannot we go at once? This place bores me. I don't like anyone here as much as my friends the goatherds, or my pal Max who makes the slingshots."

"Good Heavens, you don't kill little birds, do you?" said mother.

"Of course," said father; "as if all men do not practice such sport!"

"It is not the same thing with a slingshot as with a gun," mother declared.

Ever since father had moved to Paris, he had taken the habit of going out once a week to dine at his club. That evening when he kissed me good-night, he smelled even more than ever of Russian eau-de-Cologne. His expression was that of the cat who is just about to swallow the canary. While mother was peacefully resting, with the intention of dining in bed, there was no doubt that she was well aware of her husband's programme. In accordance with the system of his fellow club members of those days, it was certain that when they had concluded an elaborate dinner and had played cards for a short period, someone would propose a visit to Maxim's and the Abbaye de Thélème, in Montmartre, accompanied by various "demoiselles". What happened there, how they found entertainment in a very formal manner with these overdressed hussies, was a mystery into which it was considered bad form to inquire.

In all her life mother never accepted an invitation at night without father. Together they went to parties, to the opera, and rarely to the theatre—except for first nights. Of course, for a lady to go to supper in a restaurant was a solecism which only foreigners could afford as eccentric persons. It was a period when Frenchmen, considering themselves responsible for the follies of their wives, wished to keep a close eye on their behaviour. The general impression was that wives and monkeys were always up to mischief.

Uncle Ballou had come to stay with us in town, and one day I heard father singing in his noteless voice:

Ballou is going dancing
(Miron-ton, miron-ton, miron-taine).
Ballou is going prancing,
He's off to l'Élysée.

"To l'Élysée?" I interrupted.

"Yes, my poor girl . . . He has accepted an invitation from Father Fallières."

"C'est la fin des haricots!"

"Wherever did you dig up that expression?" mother groaned.

"I thought it up for the Élysée," I pretended.

"Ballou is crazy, he is going to the Élysée," said father, nauseated, and not caring who knew his feelings.

"It will be interesting," Ballou maintained.

"Interesting, to see the foul faces of those confirmed Republicans? If you want to do something exquisite while you are there, put a bomb under the staircase, and get rid of our sinister Third Republic for us."

Ballou would not change his decision. In spite of all the sarcasm he would go to the Élysée. How and why he had been invited was a mystery.

My family maintained that he would be the only guest who looked respectable.

"Watch your pocket-book! Don't try to dance, you will get your feet crushed," we warned him.

In spite of these witticisms, he left at eleven o'clock with his monocle firmly clamped in his eye socket; laughing in anticipation at his eccentric Odyssey.

Before going to ride in the Bois the next morning, father tried to wake him.

"For mercy's sake, let me sleep in peace, I will see you at dinner, Maxence," was the only reply father could get.

At six o'clock he appeared downstairs looking worn out.

"You are in bad shape, old man," father exclaimed.

"Beat, dead beat," Ballou groaned.

"You danced too much with Mother Fallières."

"Danced! What are you talking about? I was squashed in a fearful crowd of functionaries, decorated with the Poireau and the Légion d'Honneur. I was caught in a hall full of

mirrors and gilt from which I could not escape on account of the poor king and his queen, for whom the ball was being given, with all the dregs of Paris invited. It was unbelievable. I could have sworn that beards had disappeared from our earth, but it is clear that I was unacquainted with the supporters of the Republic. There was a great field of beards sprouting in all directions, and of every colour and shape, covering effectively enough the silk scarfs and slightly soiled dress-shirts brought out to honour the royal personages. In fact, to celebrate the affair, the revolutionaries had almost put on their Phrygian caps."

"Tell us about the supper."

"Supper! You are dreaming. There was a long table covered with candelabras among which a few ham sandwiches and desiccated cakes looked distinctly forlorn. As for the drinks, there was warm lemonade and a wretched sparkling Vouvray which was enough to make you sick just to think of it. *There* is a place where the most sordid economy is followed!"

"What a shame! And that is why we pay our taxes, so as to be represented by horrible pig-merchants," father grieved.

"You are really a humbug, Maxence," mother laughed; "you have not paid a franc of taxes since I have known you."

"Luckily I am smart enough to escape them, my dear."

In my capacity as an infantile international spy, I got an inkling as to what had prompted Uncle Ballou to spend such a frightful evening. I heard father inquiring, ". . . but explain, have you political aspirations?"

My uncle in a fury of indignation replied, "Imbecile that you are, a pretty woman stood me up."

The next day for the first time in my life I went to see a royal procession, and I was all the more interested because Uncle Ballou had seen the august personages at the famous "janitors' ball", as he called it. There was an immense crowd in which every head, every eye, every neck turned all together, like weathercocks where the wind blows. The men doffed their hats while the women were blowing kisses and waving handkerchiefs. Street-car conductors, chauffeurs, coachmen and even their horses seemed to be shouting, *Vive le Roi, Vive la Reine*. We could hardly see the royalties hidden in their golden coaches.

It was hard to understand these Frenchmen who tomorrow would be crying at the tops of their lungs, "Hang them! Down with the rich! Hurrah for anarchy!" and similar splendid sentiments.

Miss Hayes, reading my thoughts, smiled indulgently and remarked, "The people are big babies."

Ever since we had come to Paris there was a tradition that mother went frequently each week to the Bois, either in the coupé or the phaeton. She generally stopped at the Avenue des Acacias or at the Avenue de la Reine Marguerite to get out and walk for fifteen minutes. It was what she considered taking plenty of exercise for her health. On Sundays in the spring, when my parents did not go to the races, if the weather was fine they went to the Avenue du Bois in the victoria, with two men on the box. Our turn-out was conducted in great style. The harness and trappings, the armorial crests, the polished leather and coachwork sparkled with a thousand brilliant reflections. Sitting between my parents I hoped that among the crowds on the pavements my young friends from school would perceive me in all that glory. I must admit that we three had a slightly affected air, adopted, no doubt, the better to fascinate and dazzle the public who, sitting on rented iron chairs, were watching us, if we had only realized it, as though we were circus animals parading for their benefit.

Among the pedestrians mother recognized many acquaintances whom she had arranged, so it seemed, to have scattered through the throng for the special purpose of receiving from her that bewitching smile which became her so well.

One of the new intimate friends of the family was a lady, famous for her incredible remarks, whose name escapes me. She may have been Madame du Boulay. While I was doing some embroidery with mother one late afternoon in the boudoir, this lady was announced.

"Ah, good afternoon, my double," she cried as she entered. Someone considered, apparently, that she and mother resembled each other, which to my mind was saying a lot. There was a book by Zola lying on a chair, and the lady interjected, pointing at it with disapproval, "I see you are reading proscribed litera-



ture! Well, anyway, I have come to see you, my dear, for a little friendly advice." After settling in an armchair she went on confidentially, "I have not had a child for a long time . . ."

Mother protested, "But you have five already!" Then, alarmed at the turn of the conversation, she hustled me from the room.

As I retired slowly, I heard the lady continue: "It would do me a lot of good to start another one this summer in the country, where I am always so bored. I have had a lot of spots lately. Herbal teas and *Crème Simon* do not seem to get rid of them. Only a confinement might clear up my blood. What do you think, Antoinette?"

"For a romantic woman, you are really romantic," mother exclaimed, while I proceeded out of earshot with a very perplexed impression.

The holidays were approaching, and Gérard announced to me his imminent departure. "I am going to my château, in the most beautiful country in the world," he admitted, without modesty. "Father has left it to me in his will, apart from all other legacies. When you are grown up you will come there, old girl," he promised me.

Chaffing him, I replied, "No, thank you, not with 'The Cream of the Crop'."

"Don't worry, Biquette, we will send her flying."

That seemed impossible to me, knowing well the reputation of the countess on the second floor, and appreciating that she was not the sort of person one sent flying.

Just before leaving for St. Valery, where I was visiting once more—"The sea is good for children"—I went to say good-bye to Cousin Cathy who was on her way to spend the summer in a château her father had bought recently somewhere near la Fertésous-Jouarre—so she said, without enthusiasm. I also heard that my family had already made plans to take me with them the following winter to stay with Uncle Sosthène and Aunt Adèle in Egypt. Cathy seemed delighted with the idea. She announced—and it flattered me—that I was the only girl who amused her, because I was the only one who was always ready "to do something silly". While we were discussing the visit,

her Uncle Victor entered the room with the stumbling gait of a half-wit.

I called out to him, "Good morning, Monsieur Poitiers!"

He responded with the sort of dull bellow he always employed. The poor man was becoming more and more helpless. He then left and returned in a few minutes looking very mysterious. Approaching me, his hands behind his back, I suddenly heard a "snicker-snack", and my two pigtails were lying on the floor. Seizing them feverishly, he rushed out of the room, exclaiming, "I will put them in my mattress!"

This created a fine scandal. Mother declared that if Victor Poitiers went to Egypt she would not go under any conditions. "He would be capable of scalping us," she feared.

A few days later we left for St. Valery and got off the train at Le Crotoy, where we found old Justin at the station with a welcoming smile.

"Is uncle here?" I asked immediately.

"No, Mademoiselle, Monsieur is staying in the country somewhere in Normandy, but Madame Ballou Mère is awaiting you with impatience."

This did not affect me sufficiently to remove all my regret for his absence, but I had to make the best of it. At a slow trot behind the same old white horse, seated in the same big-wheeled cart, we crossed once more that country of flat, green salt marshes, where, on account of the treacherous spongy soil, fishing must be undertaken from a vehicle and where one needs a boat to shoot a roast of ducks. I embraced Madame Mère, who was more bearded than ever, and also the fat Camille, still wearing her same slip-shoes. Both of them began at once to mourn the disappearance of my pigtails. I confided to them the incident of the scissors, and adding a fraction of drama to the affair assured my startled audience that Monsieur Poitiers also wanted to put out my eyes. Satisfied that they had been sufficiently horrified, I advised them not to speak about it to Miss Hayes, who would surely have admitted that I had somewhat exaggerated.

The barometer indicated just then that the weather would remain "set fair", and it allowed me to toast myself on the beach and simmer in the warm pools left by the tide. Miss

Hayes, lost in a mysterious novel, relaxed beneath her parasol. Around us the same children as last year, now grown a couple of centimetres taller, were still shouting with the same enthusiasm over the same trivial incidents. They seemed more respectable. I condescended to build fortresses with them in the damp sand. The fishermen remarked, "It's fine weather," and took off their caps respectfully when we walked along the quays of the little harbour. Yes, it was fine weather. I swam every day in a modest, red woollen suit. It was hot, very hot, beneath my shady straw hat. With my toes I burrowed in the burning sand to find the cool freshness of the last tide. At noon when the village clock struck, we had to run home quickly—we were always late for lunch.

My friends in multi-coloured jerseys asked me one day to a picnic in the forest of Crécy. It was like the woods in the days of La Borne Blanche. My heart throbbed with a sad gaiety as the beloved scent of moss invaded my nostrils. The picnic was a tremendous event. There was too much unwrapping of paper—but that did not matter; the roast chicken tasted of vanilla—but who cared; the cakes had a taint of cheese—but why bother about that? It was a day apart, amusing, and a change. I went to sleep against a tree trunk and dreamed of the beauty of being alive.

"Miss Hayes, who is that lady with the red hair? Her husband calls her 'Nenette'."

"I have no idea, darling."

"Why is she wearing a pink swimming-suit, and why is the gentleman pinching her behind all the time?"

"Simone, please don't look at them, forget about it," my old governess begged as, thoroughly scandalized, she dragged me away.

Uncle Ballou was practically invisible the whole summer. He seemed less gay, and even somewhat preoccupied. I heard him asking for money from his mother, who reproached him vigorously.

Her eldest daughter, Isabelle, was furious, she said, because he received more presents than she. "Take care, my little son, you will ruin me," the old woman warned, in her cracked and broken voice.

His sisters arrived one after the other to stay. They never spoke to each other. One, a large blonde lady with cow-like eyes, who had apparently made a good match, remained for six days. She hurried off to rejoin her children somewhere in Auvergne. She had only a single topic of conversation—money. Then another appeared who was quite ravishing. This one was blonde as honey and smelt strongly of an amber perfume that gave me a headache. "I have only come for two days, so as to embrace maman," she said.

Maman, for her part, did not seem to appreciate these kisses greatly. "Ernestine," she reproached her, "you live an impossible life. If your brother knew you were here, he would return specially to put you out of the house. I have not the courage to do it myself. Who gave you those huge pearls? When are you going to get married? I hope it will be soon. I really cannot forgive the disgrace you have brought to our family . . . An illegitimate child! What a shameful business!"

Ernestine left in distress, for, in spite of everything, she had a keen family feeling. As she was going away, she whispered to me, "In my world I am called 'Mignon', you know."

It was a summer to remember, passed in the company of simple, wide-awake children who for the most part spoke in slangy terms. Down my brown cheeks honest tears flowed when I departed. To the members of the household I distributed postcards of myself, dressed in the costume of a shrimp fisherwoman.

At the end of September it was still fine in Paris. The weather had turned out to be exceptional all through the year. Little hand-carts at every street corner were sagging under the mass of great heaps of juicy yellow grapes. Miss Hayes would buy me a bunch with the admonishment not to eat too many. The apartment was empty. Mother was in Scotland, father at Biarritz. With the beginning of school I had to work again at my catechism, and this was hardly a frolicsome matter for a little girl who still had visions in her mind's eye of sailboats bobbing through the blue waters of the bay.

The family gradually reassembled. Father more polite than ever with mother, and mother more indefinitely vague than ever with father. She complained that she was tired and that

she had lost too much weight. The English method of cooking everything in water and those heavy suet puddings had not agreed with her; but she had enjoyed her stay in any case. I heard that the English lord and his lady were expecting to be in Egypt when we were there. My dog Cora had died, but I decided that I would teach the new English dog, Spot, to damp their noble shoes for them.

Since the spring, a modern and mysterious invention had invaded our hitherto peaceful home, in spite of the die-hard objections of father. It was a telephone, which at first made me run like a scared rabbit from its deafening and commanding summons. Soon I adored replying to the calls, though this was strictly forbidden. The instrument was located in mother's boudoir, at the back of a cupboard, and was contained in a mahogany box attached to the wall. Mother talked into it by the hour, retailing "The story of her life in five volumes," as father claimed. It annoyed him to distraction having to wait for her, when they were already late for dinner, until she had quite finished chatting with a friend who was feeling confidential.

This telephone was a sort of confessional or a bureau for sage advice. My parents must have had a reputation in Paris as oracles or counsellors to the lovelorn. Their talks always seemed to be with friends who could not make up their minds or who had got into some annoying situation. At the end of a long intimate conversation they would invariably conclude: "Well, we must discuss this again, but not on the telephone. It is too dangerous, there is always somebody listening on a crossed wire."

One day mother, speaking to a lady on the other end, remarked, "My dear Éliane, you are wrong to indulge in such follies. Your husband will catch you at it eventually, and then there will be a fearful scandal."

Six months later it appeared she was right. I heard her imparting to someone, "Éliane is in a pretty pickle; she was getting into her apartment through the window very late as usual the other night, and found the place had been completely rifled by a burglar. Her husband was greatly surprised, as he had been snoring in his own room and had heard nothing, the poor innocent."

Father also had long conferences on the telephone. They were with his horse-dealer, Gaston Roy, or with men friends. As maman was always in the adjoining room, he did not linger over intimate personal matters.

The only time I ever saw mother cry was at this telephone, when Sir Ronald was determined to go back to England to attend the Ascot races instead of staying in Paris for a dinner she was giving. I remained frozen with surprise behind the door of the boudoir. What? I thought, is mother crying on account of that idiotic Englishman who wants to go to the races? That man who drinks alcohol, called whisky. It is really funny, she who cries for nothing in the world is now mopping her eyes for him. Papa is right, women are fools. He has said so a hundred times.

At the beginning of winter, Uncle Louis took a ground-floor apartment near the Avenue Malakoff. I saw him quite often—usually in the smoking-room with a cigar in his mouth, conversing on all kinds of subjects endlessly with father. Mother thought he had changed a lot, and that he was more elegant than ever. His ideas were apparently completely altered. He no longer detested the Jews, and he even had a musician friend who was Semitic. It was hard to imagine such a reversal of opinion in a man who always fled from Jews as if they had the plague. It was not, in truth, that he had become reconciled to the Israelites of papa. He would continue to ignore “those Pharisees” who had nothing to offer him except their money, he claimed, scornfully. The simple ones, however, the artists, the authors, they had talent to dispense, especially in music. Not only that, but their conversation had so much resource with its dreams and inspirations. “I love them,” he exclaimed.

“Hullo,” my parents remarked in astonishment, “poor Louis is turning artistic.” They wondered whoever was influencing him.

I could not understand how he had changed into an artist without becoming dirty, without wearing a *lavallière*, and without permitting his hair to hang down his neck in the style of Jean de Nivelles.

Friends were coming every day to bid us good-bye. There was no doubt we were leaving for Egypt. I always enjoyed the

visits of the country gentry from Chantilly. Fat Madame Remard, at whose ample backside I had in the past fired rubber-tipped arrows, assured me, while she folded me in a smothering embrace, that the young people would miss me. Persons of all kinds arrived in flocks; it was as if we were leaving to explore the North Pole or somewhere equally remote.

Our trunks suddenly began to appear. They were everywhere, and filled our rooms with their gaping emptiness. In every corner and encroaching over the parquets in all directions bulging valises, smelling of Russian leather and mouthwash, left us not an inch where we could sit. Miss Hayes, with the assistance of Alice, the maid, packed enough clothes to take us to Patagonia passing by way of Central Africa. "We must have something for every climate," she insisted wisely.

Mounting on an old wooden chest, I let my legs hang down and clicked my heels, delighted that there was nothing for me to do. I was annoyed, however, at the idea of going so far away.

Gérard came up to see me with the expression of a lost soul. He envied us that we would have the chance to see the Pyramids, "From which forty centuries stare at you," he pointed out.

For my part I preferred to be stared at by the Eiffel Tower, to which I was accustomed.

Miss Hayes remarked, "French people don't like to travel." But she was not so keen herself. She had told her sister, who had come to say farewell, that she did not know how it would be possible to endure the heat.

"Au revoir, Gérard, *mon chou*, it is sad to leave, we have still so many things to tell each other." He gave me such a big kiss on my round cheek that I could not help looking at the spot admiringly for quite a long time in a mirror.

We sat in Pullman cars, which throughout the Continent are glorified with huge brass letters reading, "Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et des Grands Express Européens". I thought it a pretentious title, but still it somewhat awed me. Watching through the window, the scenery approached with more and more speed, then suddenly it turned over and disappeared like a card played to the last trick. In the strong sunlight, with nature vibrating so madly everywhere, it was strange to see the landscape pass by and fly away forever from my life,

because I could not wait. From earliest dawn I hastened back and forth along the corridors a hundred times a day between our compartment and the dining-car, but the hours dragged. Father had bought me some books about Buffalo Bill and Nick Carter.

"It is a strange kind of literature for a girl," mother protested.

Miss Hayes tried to interest me with small success in *Alice in Wonderland*, or in *La Semaine de Suzette*; but the journey kept on, and there were always those horrible valises cluttering the floor and threatening to fall from the racks above my head. The whole effect of our luggage formed a beautiful and artless disorder. At last we reached Rome and I thought a well-merited rest; it was not to be. My parents, having encountered the English family, accompanied them through the city with Baedekers in their hands, as if hallucinated. My governess—as mad as any of them—dragged me in a cab to see monuments, churches, and crumbling stones. Luckily she chose the hour for my afternoon siesta to visit the museums herself, and I was able to doze to the sound of a barrel-organ playing *O Sole Mio*. From then on everybody was talking about Michael Angelo, Raphael, and the Roman Emperors. I was thinking about spaghetti and cheese, which I doted on and ordered for every meal. Father was afraid I would get fat like a pig, while mother recalled her Neapolitan grandmother who, after enormous repasts followed by imposing desserts, would always insist on eating a dish overflowing with spaghetti and tomatoes. "It seems," she would explain, "that the spaghetti pushes all the rest along."

As a result of my loud complaints I succeeded in getting my woollen underwear removed. "You will catch cold," they warned me, in spite of the stifling heat. At our hotel there was a group of children of about my age. A young girl covered with freckles came up and asked me to her birthday party that was to take place the next day. My governess thanked her politely, and said she would seek permission from my family.

"What language was that girl speaking?" I asked Miss Hayes quickly.

"It is a kind of English," she replied. "It is really American."

"I could not understand a word she said. Do you think my

new friend Buffalo Bill talks that way when the Indians are shooting him full of arrows?"

Mother, after consulting with the English lord, who had some American relatives, told Miss Hayes she could accept for me. I went to the party with considerable timidity and found myself in a crowd of youngsters whom I could scarcely comprehend. They were quite different from all I had met before. I was particularly surprised at the boys, who spent their time boxing, for no special reason that I could see. I was asked if I had travelled much and had to admit it was my first long trip. As for them, they had come either directly from America, or by way of England and France. The birthday cake astonished me greatly because it had all sorts of good wishes written on it in sugar. I took an enormous slice with some ice-cream, the colours of the rainbow.

"Do you like it?" my hostess asked.

It was indeed delicious. A little blonde girl told me that in America she ate ice-cream at every meal, including breakfast. I opened my eyes wide with admiration. The English lord was right, America must be a fine country. Afterwards I thought often about those nice Americans who appeared to live happily, eating ice-cream all day long.

Before leaving Rome I sent a canary bird as a present to the pretty red-head of the birthday party. She had confided to me her love for birds. At Brindisi—that hot and miserable town—we had bad news: Alice, mother's maid, having gone there ahead of us with the surplus baggage, had just been taken to the hospital with something that sounded like typhoid. Mother, overwhelmed at the news, was unable to see the poor girl and kept wondering how in the world she would be able to manage without her. For various reasons, but chiefly because we could not all miss the boat, father had to remain alone at Brindisi to dispose of the complications arising from the illness.

During the sea voyage I was the only one of our party who did not remain in bed vomiting. Like an alley cat I climbed about everywhere, chewing the almond-filled caramels of the Austrian chef, with which my pockets bulged. Miss Hayes, to whom I politely offered some, drove me from her cabin with

frightful retchings. The trip proved memorable. For the first time I was able to consider myself "alone at last".

When we reached Alexandria there was a train ready to take us at once to Cairo. At the station we found Aunt Adèle and Cathy waiting for us. They wore black veils over their hats as a protection, in the manner of a meat larder, against the flies. I was chiefly astonished, however, by the gangs of porters, each dressed in a uniform according to the hotel or pension they represented. These Egyptians quarrelled among themselves in a manner so violent as to be really terrifying. Finally a policeman arrived flourishing an enormous whip of hippopotamus hide. He beat everyone of them in sight with systematic and impartial blows that succeeded in restoring a semblance of order. When at last this alarming tumult had subsided, mother presented her sister-in-law, somewhat pompously, to the English lord and lady. We also met a soft-spoken person who turned out to be Cathy's new governess, Mademoiselle Duchatin.

Cairo was at a white heat, and smelled of flowering spices. At my first breakfast Miss Hayes spread some yellow jelly on my buttered toast which I found bitter and unpleasant.

"What! You don't like orange marmalade?" she asked indignantly.

Cathy, as a very rich young lady, had a sort of private landau at her disposal, and we piled into it with our governesses and dogs. We were all swathed in veils and carried besides the traditional white parasols with green linings. On the box seat were two Egyptians, in sensational costumes, wearing red fezzes. Behind, standing on the rear springs, a third man watched over us like an eagle. He also carried a whip with which he kept off the pestiferous crowd of loafers and street merchants, who pursued us continuously with a reckless indifference to their skins. In a luxury worthy of the sluggard Merovingian kings, we drove out to Gizeh. For exercise we climbed up on the Sphinx and scaled the great Pyramid. From these points of vantage we watched the spectacle of foreign tourists, generally English, peering through pince-nez, looking comic enough in their pith helmets, and jogging along either on small grey donkeys or on racing camels. It amused us to see them being shaken about so mercilessly.

Swearing like a trooper, father joined us a few days later. "Brindisi is nothing but a disgusting bed of fleas," he groaned. "Alice was better and would return to Paris in a sleeping-car." Not only was the place filthy, but everyone had tried to rob him. "When you shake hands with an Italian, be sure to count your fingers afterwards," he seriously advised.

Mother, worn out by his complaints, finally exclaimed, "Maxence, don't you know, my dear, that the braying of an ass never reaches heaven?"

A few days later the trunks, dogs, maids, governesses, and we children set out in the small, white steamboat of my uncle to go to his property not far from Luxor. My chief regret in leaving Cairo was at the thought of not being able to watch the merchants at tea time on the steps of Shepherd's Hotel. Their indomitable persistence in trying to sell turquoise or amber necklaces was truly amazing. Then there were the snake-charmers who bewitched alarming cobras with their flutes. I missed them also.

Well, we were off at last steaming towards Upper Egypt, that unknowable land, which however failed to impress me in the end. Only the Sphinx really affected me. I had been taken to see it with considerable ceremony, but in any case even a stupid little girl could scarcely observe that timeless goddess without a certain feeling of respect. The flat expanse of the yellow Nile fascinated me, of course, with all that traffic of barges and small boats, each with its scimitar sails set at so rakish an angle. I would listen and laugh at the monotonous sing-song of the boatmen, leaning on their sweeps as they strained their feeble bodies against the might of the river. Along the banks I watched the labour of the fellaheens, bailing water from the river to their crops above. In the villages, among the mud-walled huts, the women in black with heavy veils over their faces, the naked children, the toiling men, never ceased to interest me. But most amusing of all were the little grey donkeys, trotting along with their fat owners, who sat complacently on the very hindermost part of the tiny beasts. How they managed to remain there without sliding off filled me with wonder.

Wherever a few dwellings occurred, the inhabitants turned

out *en masse* to salute the yacht with guttural cries. I was charmed at first with these demonstrations, and leaning on the rail waved my handkerchief amiably at them. After a while I gave it up. There were too many of them, the novelty wore off, and I let their welcomes go without response.

We reached Armante at night, and found it lighted up from one end to the other. Since the building only had one floor, it looked as though the house were planted and growing in the garden like a flaming flower. The whole place was surrounded by mud walls topped with iron spikes. This immense property had been purchased by my uncle "for a piece of bread", as they say, from an Englishman who had managed to ruin himself in trying to organize the project. It is said that luck never smiles on the first owner. My uncle was the second and contrived to amass an enormous fortune for himself out of his bargain.

Ten days later another shipload brought our parents and several friends, as there was accommodation for entertaining crowds of guests. Within, the place seemed too luxurious with its scarlet drapes, its round tables enriched with carved hieroglyphics, its numberless divans, Turkey carpets, and all the other extravagant embellishments of the country. There were no ancestral portraits, but large Venetian mirrors in twisted glass frames hung on the walls to match the candelabras, which looked like rock-candy and were as tempting as lollipops. All the furniture was in mahogany, transported to stand there stolidly and without grace in the midst of that African desert, as had been also an immense grand piano covered with an Egyptian shawl. This last did not survive long when mother saw it, declaring that it gave the effect of a bear garden.

My cousin's new governess turned out to be an odious creature. She was ostentatious and extremely masculine. We discovered that she needed to shave every day when she had the unhappy thought to embrace us.

"Mademoiselle is a real battleship," father bantered; "she is from Dordogne and has an accent of the Midi, but so as to impress us her speech is in an affected English."

Although only recently arrived, she seemed already to have

gained control over my aunt, and was forever giving her advice on all occasions. "Madame la Vicomtesse should do this; has Madame la Vicomtesse thought of that?"

As I detested her cordially, nothing could have given me more pleasure than when my uncle ordered her to stop singing "The Maiden's Prayer". "Your voice, mademoiselle, reminds me of frogs croaking before a storm."

When the heat of the day had abated, we went riding on small Arab horses. They were so diminutive that they gave the grown-ups the appearance of possessing long, dangling legs. The men always went on ahead together. My uncle generally was accompanied by the estate manager with whom he discussed cotton and sugar cane, or by his personal physician, Doctor Lehman, who kept him informed concerning the health of the villagers. They were usually in quarantine on account of plagues and diseases of varying virulence.

Saïd, a faithful servant who was completely dependable, accompanied Cathy and me, while the rest of the ladies remained in the house. Although they were prostrated by the heat, they chattered like one-eyed magpies, and only ventured out to stroll in the garden at nightfall. The white horse I rode was not, alas, completely peaceful like the lamented Vaillante. From time to time the animal got frolicsome ideas, but I did not dare object for fear of being condemned to remain with the older women.

I must say that Doctor Lehman was as handsome as Adonis. He was a tall dark man with the teeth of a wolf. A short time after her arrival, the wife of the English lord suddenly declared she was suffering from a pain in her back that required constant visits and treatments. It was a strange complaint from which she failed to recover throughout her stay, but it did not prevent her from playing several sets of tennis with the doctor before breakfast each morning. Privately my uncle was furious with her, and bewailed that Penelope was trying to steal his doctor away. "A person I have had in my employ for ten years already. And how can I, mere male that I am, struggle against the lace and frou-frous of a determined woman?" he asked.

Penelope, on the other hand, talking with one of the other

ladies, assured her that "the English love, but, my dear, the French know *how* to love."

The first thing I had told Cathy when we met was the story of the party with the Americans in Rome.

"You talked with them?" she asked curiously.

"Of course. I can promise you, old girl, that they eat much better than we. Just imagine, in their country they have ice-cream in all kinds of colours three times a day."

"It would make us sick," my cousin remarked in a practical manner. "And, anyway, we eat it a lot here. That ice-cream you speak of in different colours is called 'spumone'."

I was feeling in a dull mood one day and was waiting in the drawing-room for tea, with the attendant cool drinks and sandwiches to be served, when Mahmoud, the butler, appeared, resplendent in his Turkish costume, bearing hot toast dripping with butter. Suddenly a folly overcame me. I stuck out my foot and Mahmoud, dignity to the four winds, was sprawling on the floor. His fez and the buttered toast landed in a little shower on the scarlet satin of a divan. Really I have no idea what possessed me to trip him.

Everybody scolded me simultaneously. I wanted to play a little joke, but obviously it is not correct to indulge such whims with the servants. In fact tripping people is apparently no laughing matter. My luck was out: there was some of the famous spumone ice-cream that night for dinner, and I was not allowed any dessert, so as to punish me.

About that time we heard of the death of Monsieur de Bourbonne by cable. Nobody could spare a tear at the news. The only anxiety that arose was caused by the uncertainty as to his will, and the question whether it was the cousins from Brittany or the Entremonts who had finally inherited. We got the answer to this problem also by cable, and knew at last that it was neither one nor the other. It was dear Cousin Sophie, instead. How none of us had considered that possibility before seemed incredible. To realize that for so many years we had deluged that old fox with ortolans and the most meticulous attention to his smallest desires was not a consoling thought. Father was boiling with rage.

On the days when we had to stay home without going riding,

it amused me to watch the faces of the women. There were four besides our own party, of which two had an insipid air, while Aunt Adèle always had a Lenten expression. Only a lady who smoked endless cigarettes, and mother who would never dare do such a thing, had both of them a smile. At tea bland Made-moiselle Duchatin generally passed the cakes, Cathy the sugar, I the milk. How bored one can become under the fine sun of Egypt!

Once, when the ladies went into the garden, one of them filling her arms theatrically with some sparse greenery, exclaimed to another, "What a marvellous experience to gather African flowers, don't you think? Let us go indoors and put them in water."

In a few minutes she was busy making bouquets while the friend, her voice trembling with emotion, cried, "You are a genius, everything you do is full of genius."

The dinner bell rang at that moment. "Dinner, who can think of dinner?" The lady sighed, abandoning the foliage.

"You are quite right. Why eat? Why bother with such trivial matters?" the other cooed in assent.

Mother, dragging me away, confided mockingly: "My dear, you have just seen La Duse and Sarah Bernhardt in one of their most dramatic moments. I wonder why some women can never be simple. This is a lesson for you, Simone, and it shows how foolish one can be if one tries to appear clever in the hope of impressing people."

I heard, through my usual system of being always near the threshold of a door, that soon after they are born the daughters of the camel-drivers are sewn up with stitches of catgut in a certain manner, as if they were stuffed chickens. In this way the bridegroom can be quite certain that he has not been sold second-hand goods on the wedding night. Though I did not understand a word of what these cryptic remarks implied, I thought it would be interesting to go and see what kind of feathers these chickens wore. Cathy, the imbecile, was afraid.

"Afraid of what? We have legs to run, if things look dangerous. Everything is so dull here, let us go and see this new sort of chicken. The night is full of stars. Hurry up!"

I started out, leading her towards the end of the park, where

the gardeners lived. Trembling, she followed me as we pushed into a hedge from where we could keep the situation in hand. We were able to see an open door giving on a room that was lighted by a smoking torch. There was no furniture at all, but the family camel, with his legs folded beneath him, was resting in the middle of the floor. He was serving as mattress, blanket, and pillow for the children of the household, who were sleeping on one side of him. On the other side were the parents. "How funny it is," I remarked, "but where are the chickens, do you see them?"

"No, I see nothing," murmured Cathy, "but who is laughing and shouting like that in the night?" she whispered in terror. "It is perhaps a phantom, or the ghost of the Pharaohs, let us run," and she darted off like a greyhound.

For this escapade our governesses lectured us severely. They seemed awfully shocked by our story about the stuffed fowls.

A few nights later was Christmas Eve. It did not seem possible without snow or pine trees, and with that torrid July sun so very unseasonable for the favourite event of a child's year.

"Yes, of course, Miss Hayes, the Christ-Child was born under a palm tree and a blue sky. Perhaps it was actually here at Armante. Why did you not tell me about it before? Cathy, put a napkin on your head, you already look like the Holy Virgin; I will take father's cane and his nightshirt to play the part of Saint Joseph; my doll Bonnie will be the little Jesus."

Thus arrayed we rushed along the alleys of the garden, to the wide-eyed astonishment of the Egyptian gardeners who, without knowing it, represented the spies of Caesar. Christmas! Christmas! It turned out just like previous years. I had the same indigestion from eating too many marrons glacés. My best present was a camera.

"Simone, what are you thinking about?" asked Miss Hayes.

"A lot of things are passing through my head, I was thinking of our apartment in Paris; of our house in good old Orry; of Gérard, my comrade, who must be receiving about now my Egyptian postcards wishing him a happy New Year; of Vailante, the poor dear, who died of loneliness."

"Why are you crying, Simone?"

"I am homesick."

My uncle made a speech in his study that morning to his brother and sister-in-law, who kept fanning themselves so as to cover up their smiles. As if he were a king, he announced that he was changing the name of his wife from Poitiers to de la Poitières.

Papa remarked tactlessly, "She is changing her skin like a snake."

Nobody replied, but his brother gave him an angry look. A few minutes later in her bedroom maman, sitting in an arm-chair, kicked up her heels and exclaimed, "Maxence, from now on you must call me Mademoiselle de la Moutardière! Really your brother is a parvenu if ever I saw one. He seems to believe he has secured a fortune that is stronger than brass."

As mother had no personal maid, Miss Hayes came to her assistance. She was kept busy sewing on buttons, putting a stitch here or a pin there in the astonishing series of manœuvres which apparently are necessary to keep a woman's clothes from falling off. This intimacy in a common cause brought them together in a manner that living under the same roof for seven years had failed to achieve. For the first time they discovered they were both human beings. Mother began talking about life—her own in particular, but also about those of others. Miss Hayes confessed that she did not approve the custom, followed by so many Frenchmen, of reading a newspaper at the breakfast table. Mother said that she had observed this same habit in English households. She insisted that the English five-course breakfast was still more appalling to her, and a serious burden on the digestion.

Returning from an evening in Luxor, the grown-ups were still laughing at an episode concerning a lady who had fallen in love with her dragoman. He was, like nearly all of those men, more handsome than Rudolf Valentino in his most glamorous moments. A large party had gone to view the temple of Karnak beneath the radiance of a full Egyptian moon. The lady disappeared with her gorgeous Arab guide. Suddenly my uncle, annoyed at seeing his party disrupted in a way, and feeling that the lady was not displaying good manners towards her host, began crying out in a loud voice, "Afrit! Afrit!"

It produced a terrifying effect on the dragoman, who was per-

haps less amorous than he pretended to be. At any rate the other guests saw him skimming between the vast columns of the temple in disorderly flight, his white burnoose streaming in the wind, while trailing behind, panting with exertion, followed the passionate lady with her diamond necklace beating a tattoo on her fulsome breast, and with an expression of agonized bewilderment on her ageing face. Whatever had happened to her gallant escort beneath that white and scoffing moon? Afrit! Afrit, indeed. Was he fleeing from the ghost of his mother-in-law? the poor lady must have asked herself.

It was reported that she subsequently informed one of her friends, referring no doubt to my uncle's rude disruption of that tender interlude, "The French are untrustable: their friendship is like their champagne, it seems to warm you; but it is really icy-cold."

At last there is once more a long line of trunks and baggage, a few tears are shed amid a multitude of good-byes. The servants bow low, touching their foreheads and their hearts, they kiss our hands and wish us in Arabic all the joys of the Mohammedan paradise. Before we left, I photographed assiduously my relatives and their friends. We set off down the Nile on our way back to France. Mother watched the stars, which nowhere else glisten so brightly, in company with Sir Ronald. Her ladyship, stretched on a folding chair in a corner of the deck, looked more pale and sadder than ever. Her back was still hurting her, it seemed, and Doctor Lehman had not known how to cure her. This did not surprise me, as I had often heard Tata maintain that "young doctors make cemeteries humpbacked". Father, perhaps in the hope of feeling cooler, was whistling an Alpine air:



We spent a week at the hotel in Cairo, discussing our stay at Armante, the poor food, the heat, the way the sun's rays penetrated through the blinds. Maman had a particular grievance against the meals on the boat. They had given her pains in her

stomach. She thought perhaps she had been poisoned. Miss Hayes, to my surprise, remarked with some truth that guests always complain of everything, in every country in the world.

In one of the corridors father and I passed a large blonde woman to whom he bowed vaguely. Returning to our suite, he told mother that he had just seen a fine-feathered bird in the hall. "It was Sosthène's chicken," he went on; "her hair is pink, she has dyed it so much. She is just a third-rate actress," he concluded scornfully.

Mother assumed a look of disgust.

In my opinion, the large blonde did not look at all like a chicken; but lately, what with the daughters of the camel-drivers and this lady, my family seemed to express themselves entirely in terms of poultry.

Two days before we left, both papa and Sir Ronald appeared at lunch with a new kind of moustache. The ladies were indignant and thought that the pronged effect was funny and hideous. The men claimed that the feminine element was behind the times and was not aware of the fashion in moustaches. It's the latest style from London, they explained, with a superior masculine air. This is the "Kaiser Wilhelm moustache". The ladies were intimidated to a certain extent by these considerations.

"Sir Ronald and papa, please don't move, I want to take your photos." Click! "Thank you." I was delighted to immortalize their moustaches, thus imperially glorified.

At the hotel there was an Italian marquise with a half-dead expression. Her face was pretty, though too heavily powdered, and her round eyes were far too much made up. Without hesitation she hung her heart on the conquering points of Sir Ronald's moustaches. Miss Hayes rapped my knuckles because I was imprudent enough to pronounce her attractive. Papa, for his part, stated that she was too swarthy to suit him, as he only liked blondes.

Mother, nervously, looked at him with some chagrin. "I am very glad we are leaving. I have had enough of Egypt. It is a land full of cholera," she added inconsequently.

Home at last, I sat on a chair and watched Miss Hayes unpack with the assistance of Alice, whom I was delighted to find in

good health and not insane at all. Father had, however, assured us that one either dies from typhoid or remains an idiot for life. Only her scalp seemed to have suffered; that is to say, she was almost bald.

Through the window I could see the month of March displaying its usual amenities. The streets were sopping, the roofs dripped; a few carriages were rolling slowly along the slippery pavements. I did not have a single regret for the sunshine of Egypt. Reviewing the matter, I decided that travelling was not worth while. After all, what had we brought back with us to justify so much trouble? We had a few necklaces of glass beads, the yashmak of an Arabian lady, but I had also a large bruise on my leg from a fall.

"Simone, is it possible that the ruins of such a great civilization have failed to impress you?" Miss Hayes lamented.

My parents, with equal lack of enthusiasm, telling their friends about the trip, declared that it had not proved as entertaining as a winter season in France with many invitations to hunt in the provinces. Obviously Egypt was not a country for us.

I got some bad news. Gérard had been sent to boarding-school with the Jesuits in the Isle of Jersey, where the sea air would help him recover from an attack of pneumonia he had suffered during December. What a sinister bore! I said to myself.

At the classes of the Ascension I met the same little girls. The instructress complained at once to Miss Hayes because of my failure to keep up the courses by correspondence. I wondered, however, if anyone could have really worked amid the shouts of the fellaheens in that suffocating heat, and with the stories of dead Pharaohs and so many other important matters to occupy the mind. To myself I admitted, from what I felt was hard-won, superior knowledge, that the instructress knew nothing of distant travel in outlandish parts of the world.

My photos in Egypt were successful; those taken in Paris were all bad. The photographer in the store where they were developed explained the results in such a complicated manner that I understood nothing. "Photography, mademoiselle, is an art," he said, talking largely with his hands. "The secret," he went on, "has to do with the movement of the subject, the light and the focus."

"The wretched man wore me out with his discourse *à la noix de coco*," I said resentfully to Miss Hayes, who had likewise understood nothing.

A month later the English lord arrived from London without his wife. He seemed extremely happy. Everybody in the house was whispering, "Be careful that Simone does not hear the scandal." It was a useless precaution, I soon had the whole story.

"These English people are unbelievable," mother maintained with considerable anger. "They have no dignity in their lives. It is just their pleasure above all. Imagine doing such a thing to poor Ronald. A divorce, how horrible, what a disgrace! What a shame for the children! It is really frightening. Penelope should be in a straitjacket. She is crazy to run away like that with a doctor. Think of it, a doctor! She might have chosen something better." Mother raised her blue eyes to the dappled sky and the pink, hurrying clouds. It was a sign which showed that she was overwhelmed by the event.

Out of breath, I reached my study-room. "Miss Hayes, listen, the English lady has run away with a doctor. What do they mean, she has run away? I suppose it is with Doctor Lehman. Good Heavens, what do they mean?"

After a lot of discussion all our horses disappeared, except the one papa rode every morning. Two automobiles arrived in the courtyard of our building. One was for father. The body was decorated with a basketwork effect, considered so smart in those days, and had yellow wheels. The chauffeur was a new young man. The other car, painted dark blue with the same yellow wheels, and the faithful Rigobert as driver, was reserved for mother. This was luxurious enough, but it did not mean that I could abandon the bus. My parents seemed anxious to travel all day long in their new toys. They were forever occupied with endless shopping trips, with calls to make, and numberless cards to be dropped on friends.

One afternoon, walking home from my classes, I saw the basketwork of our car turning slowly into the Place de l'Étoile. Papa was inside wearing a top hat. Beside him, instead of maman, a blonde lady with an exotic-looking bird on her hat was displaying her charms luxuriantly. Something shocked me to the heart at this sight, since I knew she bore no resemblance

to any friend of our family. The bird was too big, the woman's hair too golden.

"Miss Hayes, did you see that?" I cried in alarm. Everyone had seen everything. Papa, behind the window of the car, had taken on a concerned expression.

With a sad voice my Englishwoman replied, as always in the difficult moments of our life, "Forget about it, darling."

At the corner of the Place Saint-Augustin a flower girl was stationed with her little handcart. "Let us buy a large bouquet of violets for maman," I suggested suddenly, "shall we?"

The next day father sent word for us to come to his smoking-room, where he presented me with a bicycle and at the same time slipped a hundred-franc note into the hand of Miss Hayes. Somewhat embarrassed, she did not want to accept it at first, until he remarked in a casual manner, "Speech is silver, but silence is gold."

Miss Hayes hurried to church with the money still firmly clenched in her gloved hand, and deposited it in the alms box for the poor.

Mother had recently taken up a new folly. She spent her time at the hairdresser's. At La Borne Blanche such a thing as a "wave" was never mentioned. Lately her hair seemed different. There were red copper tones that glowed in the lamplight. The word "henna" entered the conversation.

"It's not bad," papa reassured her, "but please don't let it take on the colour of a cow's tail. That is generally what happens."

On her return from a visit to the magic coiffeur, she appeared with her cheeks pinker than usual. On her upper eyelid was a shadow of green make-up. The age of experiments, of tentative trials, the sad hour in which she must attempt to prolong a young appearance, had come upon her.

Uncle Louis, when he saw her for the first time since her trip to Egypt, was thunderstruck. "How you have changed!" he exclaimed in spite of himself.

"Do I look older?" she asked anxiously.

"No, not older, but changed."

"You are right, I expect. Now, I seek to please; formerly I was pleasing," she replied with a melancholy air. "Louis, where are the days of our youth?" she went on. No longer resisting

the temptation to evoke the past, and relieved a little by his sympathy, she bent her head to one side as if listening to the plashing of a distant fountain. "Do you remember when we were young? I should have married you, and lived amid the woods of Laufleur. I was too impatient. My present life is false, and there is no real joy in my heart." She smiled with a tired expression. "What I no longer possess is my great pride and all my certainties. I thought then that I, my very self, would remain always ironic and sure. I have lost everything in becoming a simple woman."

Life was changing very decidedly at home. First it was the henna, rouge on the cheeks, and lipstick, then suddenly there was talk of tea-dances and the theatre on every occasion. Dresses were getting tighter and more revealing of the figure, hats more eccentric. There were now fewer formal dinners at home, but many more at Maxim's where, swaying to the bows of tzigane violins, the audience was transported by the airs of "The Merry Widow". My parents also dined at Larue's, at the Café de Paris, or at Voisin's, where original recipes were invented before one's eyes and simmered to a brown and luscious perfection on silver chafing-dishes. Dinners were organized frequently over the telephone, and also many balls, some of them in fancy dress. At one of these *maman* appeared as the goddess Aurora and created a sensation; but father never departed on any such occasion from his habit of wearing a pink hunting-coat and black knee-breeches, except once at a Persian ball when he was obliged to disguise himself and went as a fat eunuch of the harem, acting as guardian for mother who represented a princess of the *Thousand and One Nights*. To top off these Bohemian goings-on, mother became fascinated by a professional dancing lady whom she met by chance at a charity committee meeting. She was the famous Cléo de Mérode.

Father did not appreciate this new acquaintance. "Whatever has possessed you to talk with an actress? You are letting down the bars too much, my little one. Please give up such ideas. Know how to omit what should be omitted. If she were to say good morning to you in public when you were with friends, you would be terribly embarrassed."

There was no doubt that everything was changing in an

astonishing manner. An Argentine was giving tango lessons to mother and her most elegant friends four times a week. Hitherto they had always referred to South Americans as *rastaquouères*. It was really upsetting, nowadays. People talked with actresses and tangoed with Argentines.

Maman, following the custom of the time, was about to give a large tea-dance for which she was undergoing the final fitting of a new dress, the colour of tea-rose petals with lace covering her shoulders. We were grouped round her and admiring the effect with considerable awe. Suddenly she complained of a violent pain in her side. It was a return of the same trouble she had felt in Egypt, and for this reason it caused no special alarm.

Two days later she was dead; it happened so quickly that she seemed hardly to have had time to pass away.

I saw her last when she was almost in a coma. With an effort she touched my face with her white hand, and whispered that I was to be given her little Virgin of Notre-Dame de Lourdes, which she had received herself as a child. "Keep her carefully, very carefully, my mignonne, she is a dear friend," mother whispered ever so softly.

Papa and Miss Hayes were as though turned to stone, and could scarcely move from horror. The servants seemed like haggard shadows. Jean-Marie and Brigitte arrived as soon as possible, but were too late. My grandparents were sobbing.

"It is the hand of God," Grandmother Montigny moaned.

I perched on the arm of an antique chair with my legs swinging. The household considered me a strange child and reproached me because I did not cry enough.

The funeral rites took place in great pomp with masses of black draperies, family crests, and wreaths of pale flowers filling the church. The flowers were symbolic of her perfumed life. It seemed to me that during the ceremony maman was seated there on the bier. With an ironic smile on her face, she was looking at the crowd.

"So many come for me? How nice!" I thought she was saying. "Here are all my friends, the good and the bad. Maxence, why are you crying? Now you will be free to go and call on all the

blondes in the world without fear of annoying me or of being late for dinner. Louis, you are pale. I knew that to the end you still loved me. Ronald, my dear, thanks for spoiling me so much. My children are in black. It is sad. Neither of you is crying. Why should you, anyway? I have never made a fuss over you. Simone, you must have loved me, you brought me violets one day. No doubt I have been wrong to have always lived for myself. Here is father and mother. And Sosthène, I thought you were in Rome, you old hypocrite. I see you have dug up the handkerchief with the wide black border reserved for family burials. Good-bye, everyone. It is better so. In truth I have been a little disillusioned with this world, where all wearies, all is shattered, all passes in the end."

LITTLE COQUETTE

PART TWO



Elle a-vait une jambe de bois et pour que ça n'se voie pas, elle a-



-vait mis par en d'ssous une ron-delle en ca-out-chouc

Autres temps, autres mœurs

WITH the death of my mother the apartment gave an impression of echoing emptiness. Almost immediately our home seemed as though deserted and abandoned. Papa remained for hours on end in his study, refusing to see anyone except his closest companions, who took care never to leave him alone. He decided, after several days, to assemble maman's best friends so as to give them souvenirs of her and to seek their counsel.

At precisely four o'clock on the appointed day they were all there—even those who were generally late. Gisèle d'Orlangues was brought in, looking paler than ever in her wheel chair. She and all of them appeared overwhelmed. The sudden demise of maman had affected everyone. When tea had been served, papa, very simply, gave to each one a memento of the deceased. He showed a little partiality in this distribution: those whom he admired only slightly receiving rather mediocre trinkets.

"Now, my dear friends," he said, "what do you advise me to do about Simone?"

I was present at this sad reunion, and was sobbing quietly as Gisèle drew me to her arms. "Do not cry, my little *chou*, everything will be for the best; but I cannot see why you are here today. I think you could have been spared this sorrowful occasion."

After a while they concluded that I might go to stay with Grandmother Montigny for the summer; but there was a long discussion on the subject of my studies and my first communion. Some of them thought I should be sent to board at the Ascension; others considered it more advisable that I should only go as a day boarder. The idea of living at the convent made me shiver. Terror-stricken, I thought they might just as well condemn me to prison. Madame de Warné claimed that it was high time to bring me in touch with the realities of life such as I would encounter residing with other girls; but thanks to Gisèle and the "Beautiful Hélène", who were quite angry at the idea, father was persuaded to keep Miss Hayes on, and

arranged that I should only attend classes daily.

As though the good man should ever have had any doubt on the subject, I thought, jumping with joy, and quite forgetting the circumstances of the meeting.

"Laughter and tears go hand in hand," remarked one of the ladies as she left. The guests had already gone, however, when I began to realize how tedious the summer would prove with my grandparents, whom I scarcely knew, and for whom Miss Hayes seemed to have retained only a moderate regard.

"Well, anyway, my poor little girl," said father, consolingly, when he heard my complaints, "if you cannot get used to staying with the old she-camel, write me, and I will send you back to Saint-Valery like the other summers. Clearly the old woman wants company, and I really cannot refuse. She is your grandmother, after all."

My friend Gérard, arriving from Jersey and leaving for his place in Périgord, came to see me between train connections. Rushing upstairs from the second floor, he gave me a hug and told me how much he had been thinking about me since he heard the news of mother's death.

"It is the best people who die first," he observed. "Hullo! You have grown much prettier since I saw you last," he went on, and kissed me several times on the cheek. He had also changed a lot, although he had scarcely grown a centimetre.

The event that overcame us in the middle of June appeared to have thrown our calendar out of order. For two weeks father was so stupefied by sorrow that he had been unable to make any plans before the Fourteenth of July. On that day, so as to entertain me, he suggested that Miss Hayes should take me for a nice walk in the direction of the Porte Saint-Martin, where we could watch all the flags flying in the wind. Generally we left Paris after the *Grand Prix*. This was the first time that I was to be in town for our national holiday. Early after lunch we went wandering in a stifling heat through the festive city. The care-free, red-faced populace was singing the *Marseillaise*. It reminded me of Mardi gras—without the confetti. My feet were hurting and I did not care very much for the joyous citizens, who were embracing each other in every secluded corner. I was also slightly scornful of the celebration, having heard it said:

"Today is the servants' festival." Near the Place de l'Opéra I asked Miss Hayes if we could not rest at one of the little tables outside a café.

She burst into laughter. "What would your young friends say if they saw you sitting on the terrace of one of these restaurants? They would never stop teasing you about it."

"But my feet are hurting."

"All right, let us sit on this bench, here."

Thus it happened that we found ourselves comfortably occupying a position on the boulevard between the stalls of itinerant street vendors and small orchestras of wandering musicians who soothed us to the strains of "*Viens Poupoule, viens Poupoule, viens*", and the still more appealing "*C'est la danse nouvelle, mademoiselle*".



In the meantime painted ladies, with copper-blond hair, on every side of us were casting languorous glances at the passers-by without getting much response. Imagining that I must be at the circus, I watched, with my eyes popping, these freakish females, agitated by a passion I could not understand, in their fluffy, multi-coloured feather boas. One of them, with enormous buttocks quivering like a vast blancmange, sat down on our bench in company with a puny little man to whom in cooing tones she whispered, "My little pink treasure, you are driving me mad with love."

Miss Hayes, unable to stand it longer, dragged me off to find a cab, while I grumbled: "I don't want to leave. It is very amusing. Why does that lady need such a huge behind to sit on? I would have liked to stick in a pin to see if it would explode like a balloon."

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," Miss Hayes reported without great enthusiasm, "we went to see the celebration of the Fourteenth of July, but I do not think it was quite the place for a young girl of Simone's age."

That evening we were content to watch the fireworks from our balcony, all by ourselves. There was not a single young friend of mine in Paris. All the "best people" had escaped to the provinces, one after the other. The big city was the last place where they wished to be seen during the summer. In our street, as in all other parts of the Capital, the janitors, surrounded by their families, had installed themselves on the pavements in front of their buildings. On small folding chairs they sat with their arms comfortably crossed over their ample stomachs, smoking their pipes and listening to the chatter of their wives and children. Our own man had been with us for thirty years. At three o'clock it was already the hour for his repose. His conversation revolved around the different tenants in the building. Opinions were offered on these persons with devastating frankness, and, when each had been crushingly disposed of, it was then time to examine with equal thoroughness the other lessees along the street.

I detested our old man with his mean face. He was always bending double in an exaggerated bow and fumbling his cap in his hands. He seemed false and venomous to me. If I went into his lodge, which I did from time to time, it was on account of a photograph on the wall that fascinated me. As a youth he had been engaged as coachman by Grandmother Entremont, and while employed there he had taught one of her horses some extraordinary tricks. The photograph showed the horse sitting at table, with a napkin round its neck, quietly eating lunch. No matter how little I cared for Père Auguste, this peculiar genius of his compelled my respect. His wife, on the other hand, was a fine old woman whose qualities were not, however, appreciated by my parents. They reproached her for defiling our staircase with the smell of cooking that was too plentifully seasoned with garlic. Miss Hayes ignored them both completely, but Tata sometimes got sensational rumours and gossip out of them.

As we were about to leave this now provincial metropolis, which like the janitors was relaxing under the summer sun from a strenuous social season, I said to my father for the hundredth time, "It is a funny idea you have of sending me to Grandmother Montigny's."

"Listen, my little girl," he replied wearily, "you must under-

stand that I cannot do otherwise. She is the mother of your poor maman, and you are old enough to know that she has a fine fortune which you and your brother will inherit some day, if you do not infuriate her and get cut off, of course."

"Yes, but you know one never seems to inherit. Uncle Théodore, who sponged on us for so many years, left you *peau de zibi sur balai de crin*," I replied sarcastically.

"Where does she get such expressions, Miss Hayes?"

"I fear it is from you, Monsieur le Comte."

The trip was long and hot. I watched through the window the rich countryside that stretches between Paris and Tours. Toward eight in the evening we arrived at Saint-Mars-la-Pile where grandmother was waiting for us. Beneath the smoky lamp of the small station platform, she brushed my cheeks with lips that seemed to smile too much considering her black mourning dress.

Grandmother was of average height, but she increased her stature by wearing shoes with exceedingly high heels that curved inward in those days at the back, in what was considered an elegant manner. She was tightly laced in her corset, and this gave her a wasp waist and a prominent bosom, which perhaps she did not really possess. Her grey hair, once black as a raven's wing, curled naturally. It was gathered on the top of her head, and held there by two large tortoise-shell combs, encrusted with small diamonds. Grandmother's nose was very straight, but a little too long. Somehow is harmonized well with her face.

In accordance with Miss Hayes' formula of never travelling without all our earthly possessions, we had three large trunks which had to be balanced on top of the omnibus, where they teetered perilously. As we drove to the château behind two lively horses, the last traces of the sun's afterglow tinted the glassy surface of the Loire with delicate tones that entranced even me, at an age when such beauties usually fail to impress.

"Your grandfather is waiting for you with impatience. He wanted to meet you, but he was a little tired. He is getting old, the dear man," grandmother remarked.

In the dusk I looked at her, and suddenly she reminded me of maman. The darkness of the night glossed over the thousand wrinkles of her face; her black straw hat hid the grey hairs. My heart stopped, and I wanted to cry, but the rhythmic motion

of the carriage lulled me to sleep in the midst of these sad reflections.

"Wake up, my *petite chatte!*" In the light of a large lamp shining from the house I saw shadows moving around the carriage. A prickly beard was crushed against my face. "She is completely worn out. Put her to bed at once," said Grandfather Montigny, quite touched at seeing me.

The next morning I noticed that my room communicated with grandmother's and that Miss Hayes had been banished to the second floor, where the hot sun was always shining. I was anxious and annoyed. Such an arrangement did not augur a pleasant visit. So as to win me over, grandmother invited me to climb into her bed for early breakfast, where I found her extended comfortably with a nightcap on her head. The bedroom was littered with a mass of photographs, framed inconsistently in all kinds of ways, and with an incalculable number of small pieces of furniture. While I was eating a slice of brown bread dripping with honey, my eye observed through the window a delightful view extending to a distance of a dozen miles in every direction over a landscape that I remembered vaguely, but which surprised me just the same with its smiling fields and green copses. It was the true country of Indre-et-Loire, known as the granary of France. The château itself, built in the Norman style, was extremely well located on the top of a lofty hill, surrounded by trickling streams that meandered in gossamer threads to the far horizon.

Before lunch, announced by two strokes of a bell at an interval of several minutes, my governess and I were introduced to several relatives who were guests in the house. Grandmother had told us that this year, because of the bereavement, she was only asking relations or intimate friends to stay. In the circle awaiting impatiently for food, I met Monsieur and Madame Federovich. They appeared to have emerged from a lost world and one that did not wash. Their strange intonation assailed my ears. I already knew the accents of the English, the Italians, that of the south of France and of Egypt; but this Polish one with its rolling "r's" was stronger than any. I curtsied to the lady whose hair was frizzled like lamb's wool, and this was bad enough; but her husband was even worse in a floppy black tie

and a shiny black suit seeming not to fit anywhere. With a long and skinny finger he was occupied in beating time to a tune he was carrying in his head, I suppose. Sitting next to this pair, on a red sofa adorned with fringes, was a huge lady balancing gaily on her crown a veritable edifice of pepper-and-salt curls. She seized me fiercely and assaulted my cheeks with two sonorous kisses. I looked at her in stupefaction, recalling suddenly the woman of a hundred kilos who could lift such enormous weights at the "Gingerbread Fair".

Grandmother introduced me, "My sister, your great-aunt, Germaine." Somewhat astonished at this curious person, I dropped her a curtsy. A serious man with a bushy and imposing beard then bowed to me with dignity. "My brother-in-law, your great-uncle, Rudolphe LeBlant," said grandmother.

I smiled at him sweetly, and pirouetted round to meet other strangers. Among them I noticed a ravishing lady sitting in a deep armchair. She was dressed in the same style as mother, and I was greatly relieved to discover in her a human being—according to my own standards. Beside her an elegant gentleman seemed to be slightly bored. "These are your cousins the Raymond de Cruzes," grandmother went on. "Now, you cannot say, as you did when you were young, 'An old grandfather, an old grandmother, an old dog, only old people!'" These children are almost your own age," she concluded, beaming at them.

At last I ended up my tour with a very correct couple, "the cousins Amadée," a brother and sister, who looked extremely conservative.

All this concourse was in half-mourning, on account of mother, including even the "Federos", as they were called, though not belonging to the family. I concluded that they must have been born in black. During that first luncheon I studied all these people who appeared to have come from another planet. If father had seen his uncle, LeBlant, hidden behind his cascading beard, or Maestro Federovich with his ebullient whiskers, his artistic tie, and his musical finger, he would have exclaimed, "This takes the cake!"

I was astonished to discover, I must say, that Federo's only conversation concerned music, with the complete approval of my grandmother, who was delighted at that kind of so-called

artistic talk. It went with the Fréteval family, I supposed. Great-Aunt Germaine for her part spoke only of painting, of water-colour exhibitions and such affairs. In fact her own work in that medium was a gift she bestowed on all her relations, and the walls of a La Touche were considerably over-adorned with samples of her talent. Her husband, Rudolphe, had little conversation. I found out that as a banker he was only interested in his bank, and for relaxation in his wife's paintings. Throughout the meal the talk continued to revolve around operas and such subjects. Madame Federo in her guttural voice from time to time inserted remarks which meant little, but succeeded in annoying everybody. I was sitting next to her and she took the opportunity to tell me the story of her life: how she had known grandmother in Naples long ago; how she had a son in South America; what splendid talent Federo possessed for composing enchanting music, but alas, that he adored high living too much.

I murmured at suitable intervals, "Ah, yes, madame, yes, madame, yes, madame." Most astonishing of all, I observed that the Cruzes had a Bordeaux accent; this seemed inconceivable to me among persons who professed to be properly educated. They dropped suddenly in my esteem with that discovery. The Amadées got through the meal with great dignity. She refused somewhat disdainfully, the shallots that the butler passed respectfully with the salad. From behind her lorgnette she then watched grandfather with a critical eye as he ate a pear with some *chabichou*, and remarked, "Really, Antoine has some strange habits."

When the coffee was served in the drawing-room, I was shown the Cruze children, two adorable cherubim with curly blond hair, who enchanted me immediately. I had never held a baby in my arms, and when one was given me he seemed infinitely sweeter even than my Bonnie.

"What an adorable child, but what is he doing on my dress?"

"Ah," cried his mother in distress, with her southern accent still stronger than ever, "he is wee-weeing on your knees."

Everyone took on a self-conscious look, except Uncle Louis, who had arrived somewhat late for this first luncheon. He could not help laughing at my disgust. In a carefree manner he

mired it greatly and painted it on all his goddesses."

"What a funny idea!" I exclaimed tactlessly, without thinking. "It reminds me of the humps on the camels I saw in Egypt last winter."

The good lady, completely outraged, rushed off at once to remonstrate with her sister. She said that I offered a perfect example of the teaching in convents. Until she left she continued to call me "bad seed", and this upset my governess, while it left me unaffected.

Thanks to bezique, grandmother and Miss Hayes got along like two thieves at a fair. The old lady was always permitted to win, after a good struggle, and this enchanted her to the last degree.

"She is not so terrible, really. She is simply a very conventional woman, who does not like to overstep the bounds," said my Englishwoman philosophically.

That was exactly what I felt and thought in that reserved company, where nobody overstepped or allowed himself to be entertained with gossip or jokes. When the conversation turned on people whose private life might be subject to criticism, the voice of the speaker became grave and censorious, while grandmother was sure to add her narrow-minded opinion without the smallest trace of leniency.

While I was riding with Uncle Louis one morning he confided to me: "What is particularly annoying about these Protestants is that they consider us Catholics so wicked, and they are themselves more boring than anyone else in the world. I would like to play a duet on the piano with Federo, but he spoils my pleasure by eternally reciting passages from the Bible."

"After all, uncle, don't you think they are terribly bourgeois?"

"Yes, indeed," Uncle Louis agreed.

These ladies and gentlemen, who pretended to adore Degas and dote on Wagner, in fact spent their time in household pursuits. With baskets on their arms, their hands carefully protected by white gloves, they went out picking currants to make into jellies, or else strawberries, nectarines, peaches, and raspberries for the table. They also returned with handfuls of lavender for the linen room, while the more hardy among them collected mushrooms and edible fungi in the field, or even

grasshoppers for the canary, piping his little lungs out in the salon. When it rained, the ladies tidied up the bulging chests-of-drawers, where every kind of article was neatly sorted and bound in bundles with red ribbon; then they went through the Normandy cupboard filled with odds-and-ends labelled "for the poor", from among which, to my horror, grandmother one day chose a piece of material in black-and-white checks, so as to make me a new dress, trimmed at the wrists with English lace.

Though nothing was suffered lightly in this little circle, and though everyone was supposed to be taken at his face value as the height of rectitude, I do not know why, but each gave the impression of not trusting the other. Grandfather was the only person who did not belong to this group of prejudiced moralists, suffering at the bottom of their hearts from self-imposed persecution. He was ready to enjoy life if they would only give him a chance. Presiding at those long repasts of rich food, he liked to discuss wines and good living. If by chance the conversation took a merry turn, it was due to his constant efforts. The poor man was always trying to get a little good cheer into an atmosphere where the discourse was so miserably soggy one could scoop it up with a spoon.

Grandfather was big and blue-eyed—a true type of gentleman-farmer, with the prosperous, sanguine assurance and brawny steadiness that go with country squires in all hunting countries. His days were always the same. He got up early and went down to the courtyard, where he took a rapid glance over the park that extended to the farm lands beyond. Then he went to the stables to inspect the horses and the kennels of his hounds. There followed visits: to his vegetable gardens where he observed with care how much dew had fallen; to his pear trees, noticing if the new shoots were correctly trained; then he busied himself pulling up a weed here, arranging a bell-glass there, fixing a broken frame. Finally he called the head gardener, his old friend Frédéric, and asked news of his wife, Perrine, who had charge of the poultry run. His day continued to be taken up in a rustic manner, directing the work on his two thousand acres of land dotted with woods and ponds, containing nine farms leased to different tenants. This estate was his great joy and the object of his constant attention. He felt so much more at

ease among his peasants than in the Protestant circle of his wife, who in spite of changing her faith had never been able to disregard her former associations. Sometimes with a sarcastic smile, he would remind a friend how when he married his fortune had only amounted to a carved sideboard and a silver spoon. "Not very much," he conceded, but he prided himself that he had succeeded so well with so little.

In my own family I thought nobody was very affectionate, but everyone seemed to be friendly and felt at home. They teased and abused each other without malice, in an atmosphere of pleasant good will. It was true that maman had always maintained a certain reserve, for which she was somewhat apologetic, but she felt constrained to it so as to keep the men in check. "Without that, Lord knows where we should be," she argued. In our house stories that were really harmless circulated freely, no doubt, but those snatches of gossip came in at one ear and went out the other. At my grandmother's, where there was a turn-over of guests each month, it was different. Nobody seemed to get joy out of life, and above all each one feared to assume the slightest simplicity in another's presence. I was astonished at their manner of speaking in an affected and pompous manner and their lack of sincerity offended me greatly.

Miss Hayes explained to me that Protestants and Catholics do not view life from the same angle.

"The Calvinists have a fearfully boring angle," I assured her, feeling certain that I spoke truly. "As for me, Miss Hayes, I only like the Catholics."

"Well, you are wrong, Protestantism is as fine as Catholicism. All religions have their good points," she maintained with her usual open-mindedness, "as long as they inspire human ideals and teach you to love your neighbour."

"Even the Jewish religion?" I asked with some doubt.

"Of course; don't forget that Jesus Christ was a Jew, after all."

"That is so, I had forgotten," I said pensively. "However," I went on, still holding to my ideas against the Protestants with whom I could not agree, "you know they have a curious life, these *parpaillots*. The new guest, Monsieur Nirabeau, for instance, with his airs of B.S.P., and his constant subservience to the opinions of his fat wife—well, he received lately a funny

letter in his mailbox. I found it, by chance, sticking out of the pocket of a raincoat that was lying on a chair in the hall. The stupid man had forgotten it for a minute. He came back and looked everywhere for that letter, which was clearly giving him an attack of jaundice. Would you like to read it, and will you please explain it to me, Miss Hayes?"

Sometimes, my adorable one, I am insane for an hour at a time. I feel like a wild animal caught in a trap. I tremble, I am frightened, my thoughts leap to escape from themselves. It is not longer possible to have doubts or hope. . . . I am pregnant. It is terrible. I am overwhelmed with fear. I fear your reproaches, my beloved, you who have always urged me to take all precautions. Why don't we run away? My sister has never loved you, because of Paul, whom she wanted to marry. Let us escape to Algeria. In that way I could save your child, whom I love, as much as I do you, my dear angel.

Daguemard.

"It is terrible," my governess gasped; "you are really devilish the way you discover things. After the great trouble I have taken to bring you up as a little lady, here you are stealing letters out of people's pockets. You really are breaking my heart. Above all, don't say a word of it to anyone," she continued anxiously; "you could ruin the lives of these wretched people."

On her advice, considerably alarmed, I immediately put back the letter with its confession in the pocket of the famous B.S.P. waterproof. Then, no longer able to stand the half-dead expression on the poor man's face, I whispered to him, "Monsieur Nirabeau, the letter is in the pocket of the raincoat."

Five days later he received an urgent "business" telegram that forced him to cut short his stay, "to his infinite regret." He left, suddenly, without ever having dared to look me in the face.

In our house, I thought, such an affair would have seemed scandalous, of course, but papa and maman would have surely racked their brains to help if they could. Doubtless they would have remarked indulgently, "No offence is unpardonable."

In grandmother's circle, if the slightest breath of this drama had stirred, thunder and lightning would have followed, as

though it were the Last Judgment. That society held no place for the weak, and those who were down got trampled to death.

I used to hear Jean-Marie recite in his high baby voice:

Catholics, they go to mass
On the backside of an ass.

The reply to this refrain was:

Protestants, the dirty lice,
Fall off donkeys in a trice.

Recently it has given me some relief to murmur, over and over again:

Protestants, the dirty lice,
Etc., etc., etc.

One by one the mysteries of life were gradually being revealed to me. I was going on thirteen; my family had always more or less held to the theory that children should gather their knowledge a little at a time, provided they do not discuss the subject. Through Uncle Louis, I had met about then a charming girl, Françoise du Ruffet, who was in one of the senior classes at my school. Owing to the difference in our ages, we had never got acquainted, but I discovered that her mother and maman had been friends during their childhood. Françoise was slender and distinguished, with large green eyes so limpid and deep they reminded me of spring water. Her nose was straight with a slight uptilt. She had a small mouth and milk-white teeth. Her hair was soft, silky, and of an ash-blond colour, like virgin honey. As for her complexion, it was perhaps a little too pale; even her hands lacked the slightest tan, but it gave her an anæmic, aristocratic appearance that would have seemed washed-out if it had not been for dark eyebrows which lent her face a somewhat determined expression. Françoise was two years older than I, but luckily this made no difference. The château of Ingouville, where she lived with her mother, was small and ancient. It was located on the edge of my grandparents' estate, so to speak. We began going riding together early each morning with Uncle Louis, who provided her with a horse.

Blushing slightly she confided to me, "Mother has not a penny, you know, to buy riding-horses."

When I was invited to Ingouville, grandmother was annoyed, but did not attempt to forbid my going.

"Those ladies are the protégées of your Uncle Louis, so I can say nothing," she commented in a sour voice. Grandmother, as a matter of fact, criticized them on every possible count. Madame du Ruffet, she pointed out, was very poor and separated from her husband. She was pretty, of course, and still young in spite of having a fifteen-year-old daughter. As for the child, she was badly brought up in any case, and spent eight months of the year with her mother in Paris at the house of a relation, Madame de Granville. "No doubt they enjoy a sort of knockabout life there," grandmother sniffed.

Such claptrap sentiments, intended to display rival Protestant virtues, left me cold. I had seen others besides the Ruffets who knew how to be gay, and liked that spirit more than anything. In our home pretentious and prudish people were not on the list of my favourites, and I put them out of my mind as quickly as they appeared in order to have plenty of room for remembering the agreeable ones.

In spite of the long, disapproving faces of the conservative element at La Touche, I spent all the time I could with my new friend. Miss Hayes and I had a mule with an English cart at our disposition, and it enabled us to attend parties in the neighbourhood, particularly at Ingouville, where Françoise and her mother received us always with cries of delight. I soon came to the conclusion that whatever had to do with Uncle Louis or maman touched the heart of Madame du Ruffet with all the lasting memories of early girlhood friendship. When she first saw me, she remarked, "How quickly time passes, my dear Louis; I still have upstairs in a drawer somewhere a box of sugar-almonds Antoinette sent me to announce Simone's birth. Poor Antoinette!"

When she pronounced mother's name, the face of Uncle Louis became pale, while Madame de Ruffet in her emotion pressed his hand softly. In Touraine they were the only persons who spoke of maman. I was grateful. Her spirit haunted me in the La Touche environment, so different from hers. I now realized

that she had been a gay and tender mother with the most lovable qualities.

"How big she is already!" Madame de Ruffet added, referring to me.

In fact I had grown a lot lately. A few days before she died, maman had remarked, "You are growing like a weed. . . . It is time for you to wear long stockings up to your knees, and I think a cadogan in black Flemish silk would be nice in your hair. You are beginning to make me feel old."

Miss Hayes considered the Ruffets charming. They spoke excellent English. But this did not prevent grandmother from refusing to receive them in her house.

"Why don't they come on my day?" she said in a superior manner. Perhaps she did not take into account that because of mourning she was not having any "at homes" that year.

Furious at this I complained to my governess: "How can you say old Grandmother Montigny is not disagreeable to the end of her finger-nails? The way she treats my friends makes me ill. Anyway, it is not fair. Madame du Ruffet is only separated from her husband, but grandmother treats her as though she were divorced."

"I beg you, Simone, don't pronounce that terrible word. In your family it would give them a fit. Well-brought-up girls, you know very well, have never heard of divorce."

The heat being excessive, Uncle Louis took Françoise and me out early every morning. At dawn the forest gave off an exquisite odour, and all round us birds were twittering their timid songs. We went for breakfast to Laufleur and I noticed that it had changed subtly since the death of my great-aunt, Amélie. I thought that it seemed new, that something more vital had taken possession of the rooms, though there were still no flowers in the vases.

At tea one afternoon at La Touche, there were gathered a few close friends, and among them the Ruffets were present at last. I was busy passing the sugar when a strange couple entered the drawing-room. Scratching my head it seemed that I remembered the face of the gentleman. Let me see, I considered, let me think a little, who is he? The lady I had never met, but he . . . who is he, anyway? When he was introduced, grand-

mother murmured his name, "Monsieur Gabriel de Loches," and by his penetrating dark eyes I recognized him finally. Mon Dieu, it was "the satyr".

Miss Hayes came running up to me, she was so delighted to see once more the face of someone she knew in the happy days of La Borne Blanche.

"He has changed wives," she pointed out.

"Hullo, yes, that is true, the 'weeping willow' has cried herself out of a husband."

Some mornings later, Uncle Louis, sitting on the grass, was reading poetry to Françoise. She had already admitted to me privately, without a single question on my part, "I am crazy about him."

"You are mad, he is an old man," I replied in astonishment.

"He may be old, but I only like mature men. That is all there is to it," she replied seriously.

As I was not in love with Uncle Louis, his poetry left me quite cold. I preferred to pick flowers to decorate the vases in his house. Looping the reins of my horse round my arm, I pursued a narrow path, whistling, as I gathered a bouquet. The mist of morning had gone, beams of sunlight sifted through the trees. In a thicket I saw a person, half concealed. It was the satyr on horseback. I stood still, dumbfounded. My heart was beating. Then I called out, "Good morning!"

He came up and apologized for giving me a fright.

"A fright? You did not frighten me, you just surprised me."

"Do you go out every morning like this?"

"Yes, with Uncle Louis, who is over there reading poetry," I replied quickly. Slightly set back, he turned to look while I mounted my horse so as to avoid his company. By now I had learned more or less the meaning of the word "satyr". I had heard that a satyr was a nasty individual in a general way, and I was suspicious of this one.

He took the bridle of my horse and said in a commanding manner, "Come with me, I will show you a place full of flowers."

All of a sudden I was alarmed. Something about this big man was terrifying with his hawk-like predatory appearance.

"I can remember you when you were only eight. You have

remained ravishing with rosy-apple cheeks," he said leaning toward me.

These compliments began to soften me a little. I replied, without thinking, "I remember you well. They used to call you 'the satyr' at home."

An expression of anger distorted his face and chased away the charm with which he had entranced me a moment before. It lent me strength to fly immediately. I gave my horse a sharp blow with the crop, and he started off across a field while I beat him again and again, feeling that I was being pursued by a dangerous man. I reached at last Le Petit Portail, one of uncle's farms, and entered through the gate at full gallop, expecting to find someone in the yard; but in dismay I realized not a soul was there. They were all out harvesting. My horse and I hurried into one of the hay bans. Hiding motionless, I trembled. Through a crack in the wooden side wall I could see the tall figure of our country neighbour. He looked wild and fierce as he inspected the different buildings with care. I had gooseflesh all over. It seemed certain that he would find and kiss me, that fearful old man who beat women mercilessly. I was horrified at the prospect. Through some lucky chance the farmer's wife arrived just then in a leisurely manner, and was curious to know what the satyr was doing in her yard.

"I have lost my dog," he answered in a temper, at the same time mounting his horse.

A few minutes later I came out of the barn, to the wonderment of the good woman. Not understanding what was happening, she let me pass without a word. Perspiring and shaking I told Uncle Louis, who was alarmed at my late return, a long story about the horse having run away.

"Surely, you are not expecting me to believe that an old circus horse like that ran away? It changes all my ideas about him," he laughed.

It was on this very day that a Madame Blanchard was giving a party for some young girls of my age. We all went in the pony-cart, with Miss Hayes driving the mule. Suddenly a couple appeared on horseback whom I recognized. They stopped to chat with us, and the man looked at me unhappily while grandfather was describing to everyone within earshot how the oldest

nag he owned had run away that morning with his little granddaughter.

"There is no horse so steady that it does not misbehave," remarked Monsieur de Loches, recovering his equanimity. As he was leaving, he passed near me and murmured, "Thanks, you are very intelligent."

Thinking about the affair, I tried to imagine what Françoise and Uncle Louis would do if they had known the truth about the runaway horse; but neither to them nor to Miss Hayes did I confide a word of this adventure. It was my first big secret. To tell the truth I was not fearfully proud of the episode. It was a little upsetting when I thought of the dark eyes of that man. Marred though they were by large pendant pouches, they retained nevertheless a certain youthful fire beneath the drooping lids. But back of them, as they lighted up from time to time, I could see a cruel expression.

Often in the afternoon I went to the farmyard of the château. "Good morning, Perrine," I called out when I arrived. "Are you going out with the cows? I have been given permission to help you. I want to play at being a farmer's wife, like Marie-Antoinette."

Then I would feast on sour milk, with two great slices of bread baked in a primitive oven, covered with thick slabs of sweet butter, and seasoned with spring onions. We had a fine farmyard all right. The dairy smelled of all those wonderful milk products; butter, sour cream, cheeses, everything gently preparing or mellowing for our table. In fattening-boxes capons were stuffing themselves for our frying-pans. An enormous pig was rolling in the manure of his pen, or guzzling from his trough while waiting without anticipation to be transformed into sausages, minced pork, and chitterlings. Finally in the cowbarn twenty cows and their calves swung their tails in rhythmic cadence.

"Mère Guédon," I asked an old servant, "how old are you anyway?"

"Ninety-five, our demoiselle."

"And you have never left the village, nor seen a train? How have you spent your life, Mère Guédon?"

"At spinning wool, our demoiselle."

Not far from La Touche lived a nephew of grandfather, named Albert Montigny. He was a strange character. Refusing to see his family more than once a year, he preferred to spend his life alone with his housemaid, a fat girl who softly and freely rolled her Touraine accent, and loved him with a tender affection. Each year toward the end of summer he invited his family for a country party at which they lunched on the ground in a meadow. It was a kind of picnic, disliked by all on account of the damp grass, the ants, and the earthworms. His dogs enjoyed the chicken bones, however, and I for my part had no fears for the other hazards.

As soon as lunch was over, we went to a stream to fish for crayfish. Albert Montigny had his gamekeeper in attendance to assign to each of us a place along the bank. In the clear water we could see numerous crustaceans attracted by the raw meat in our nets. We would draw them in cautiously with the sun beating down mercilessly on the backs of our heads. While we were busy fishing, two fine gendarmes with polished boots and well-curled moustaches appeared. Without warning they drew up a *procès-verbal* against our cousin who became scarlet with indignation at their impertinence. We had to go back with police tickets in our hands and without crayfish, as they had all been seized for evidence, and also for the dinner of the two worthy gendarmes. The incident had taken place because the local mayor, a Radical-Socialist, having got wind of the project, thought it an excellent opportunity to spoil the day for the Montignys, well known for their Bonapartist leanings. Grandmother being strongly republican supported the mayor, claiming he was only doing his duty. Thus the pursuit of crayfish illustrated the political ideas of my relations in Touraine, and showed how completely opposed they were to those of my father, who, in fact, was more royalist than the king himself.

In a two-wheeled cart, with the coachman behind, we went sometimes with grandma to visit old friends of hers in the neighbourhood. She took care not to bring any of her Protestant relations along, as they never had anything to do with the Catholics. Before leaving I would examine myself carefully in a mirror and decide that I was not bad at all in my mauve dress

with an Irish lace collar, and that the black straw bonnet I generally wore on such occasions was really becoming.

"You look already like a young lady," Elisa, the chambermaid, assured me as I walked down the hall thus attired.

The "day" of the dowager Baroness de Bonnal was always a great success. People arrived from every direction, since she was very important. I must say she presented an imposing appearance as she received her guests in her fourteenth-century castle. It was a noble edifice and was crammed with the finest Gothic tapestries. She lived there surrounded by her eldest son, her daughter-in-law, and seven small grandchildren, who were all girls—one for each day in the week, no doubt. Looking at them, so well brought up, with their serious little faces, all dressed in identical white frocks and wearing pale blue sashes, I thought at once of the "good children" of the Comtesse de Ségur. Aymonde, the second of them, was the same age as I. She was a charming blonde, extremely gentle, though slightly too reserved, perhaps. She would have liked to go riding or bicycling, she confided to me; but her mother thought such pastimes too dissipated. I observed her mother, a native from Bordeaux possessing the usual fearful accent. It appeared, so Françoise told me, that her father had accumulated great wealth in the wine industry and had then succeeded in marrying his daughter to Baron Alexandre de Bonnal, who was extremely anxious to repair his old castle and his fortunes that were, no doubt, in an equally lamentable condition.

This lady had a fine moustache, and was both rotund and very Faubourg Saint-Germain in appearance. She resembled many of the ladies at the large receptions in my parents' house, where they generally looked like cooks, and all insisted on wearing old-fashioned clothes. Not the slightest suspicion of powder softened the face of the Baroness de Bonnal. Possibly she shone thus unadorned in order to harmonize her face with her greasy hair. She belonged obviously to another of those families where washing took place rarely. It seemed quite natural to them, I suppose, that there was not a bathroom in the château. A bathroom would have been a dissolute luxury.

On account of their mourning, my grandparents, though they went to the party, did not mingle with the other guests; instead,

they were shown to a small private room, where close friends came to see them. They did not wish to be cut off completely from the world, they explained; but this curious custom of accepting invitations and yet not being seen in public was considered very correct in those days.

As we were driving home, grandfather, who was not a riding man, remarked: "I would like the Bonnals very well if Alexandre did not have the annoying habit of running his stag-hounds over my land every winter. His entire hunt proceeds to break down my fences, destroys my young trees, gallops across my winter wheat, and frightens my cows out of their milk. If it pleases him to hunt, nothing else disturbs him. He reminds me of King Stanislas, of whom it was said that when he had taken wine Poland was drunk."

Grandma did not reply to these comments, preferring to overlook such annoyances on the part of her important neighbours. In the winter as a matter of fact she rode to hounds herself once a week.

One day a neighbour came to pay a visit and arrived in his new car. It was no small event. My grandparents, living as they did all through the year on their property, had never in their lives, to tell the truth, driven in an automobile. After mother's death the question had arisen of giving them a car, but father changed his mind suddenly, as he considered that Madame Montigny had not shown enough grief at her daughter's death.

"The day after the funeral, seemingly quite recovered, she had gone shopping at the Bon Marché, as if nothing had happened," said father indignantly.

The daring neighbour offered us a drive and after considerable hesitation it was decided that we should go to Tours in his car. Uncle Louis also accepted the invitation to join us. On the appointed day at precisely eight o'clock we started, scorching along at the vertiginous speed of twelve miles an hour. As we forged ahead on our death-defying way, dust rose in clouds, horses shied wildly. Miss Hayes had not been able to come as we should have been too crowded. In the circumstances she gave me fifty francs to spend. It was the first time in my life that I had such a sum at my disposal. There were two louis

d'or and a ten-franc gold piece. All along the way I kept a finger on my purse which had been carefully wrapped in a handkerchief in my pocket. We reached town at about eleven-thirty and went to the rue Principale where grandmother left us to hustle into Lamoureux's the grocer. Grandpa and my uncle needed to buy things for the opening of the shooting season. I followed them, with my eye on the store fronts and my pocket burning from my unexampled fortune. Miss Hayes had recommended as I left that I should buy whatever I wanted, but that I must not spend the entire sum. Next door to the gunsmith's was a shop dealing in handbags. I stopped there in a trance. *That* was exactly what I wanted—a handbag.

"Nice young girls don't have such articles," said Uncle Louis reprovingly. "What could you put in a bag at your age? You would do better to buy a doll."

"A doll! What do you take me for?" I cried, greatly horrified at the idea. "I am much too old for that."

"Well, perhaps some water-colours so as to amuse yourself painting," he suggested.

"Heavens, no!"

"Then some embroidery in needlepoint."

"You are mad! How awful! I have already far too much."

"Well, get what you want," he continued in a vague manner. "I have other fish to fry."

After lunch he left us at the Hôtel de l'Univers, without saying where he was going. Grandfather, taking me by the hand, announced, "I am going to buy something for you, *petite*."

"You have an idea?" I asked, astonished and intrigued. "I don't find anything I am allowed to buy that pleases me."

"It is a little gun for you, silly goose!"

His idea left me somewhat cold.

The next day Françoise, in great glee, showed me in secret a gold bracelet on her wrist. "It was your uncle who brought it to me from Tours."

Well, hullo, I thought, he showed more imagination for her than for me.

About that time Jacques, the favourite nephew of my grandmother, arrived from Switzerland bringing with him his blonde wife, a sort of peasant type. They were both Protestants, but

very different from those I had seen hitherto. I heard the stuffy old crowd saying amongst themselves, to my great astonishment, "He is always making witty remarks."

I asked Uncle Louis about it and he confided to me, "You see he is a famous writer, and he fills the whole family with respect."

A few days later I concluded that he also brought them sorrow. I heard his wife complaining to grandma that he was constantly untrue to her. "You must believe me, my dear aunt, when I tell you that he has no imagination, so he is always on the lookout for new experiences and sensations. Since we have been married he has already had four mistresses, and does not even bother to hide the fact. 'What is there that one is not forced to do for the sake of literature?' he asks. At this moment, for instance, the woman is a dairymaid in the Canton of Vaux, as his next novel is to be fundamentally Swiss."

Grandmother, scandalized, in a low voice as though terrified at dipping into such impurity, counselled her strongly not to breathe a word of such matters to anyone. Nothing could be done about it in any case, and then, "Dear Jacques has so much talent, my poor child, you should forgive him many things."

This incident surprised me exceedingly, but it made Françoise burst into laughter. Since she was the sort of girl who also enjoyed confiding in others—a habit of which my family had cured me long ago—she told me that the author had kissed her the other night on the steps at Ingouville. He had come to call on her mother for no evident reason after dinner.

"What did you do then?"

"Well, my dear, I let him go on," she said, much amused at my bewildered expression.

After all, grandma is not so far wrong when she says that Françoise is badly brought up, I thought.

"It shocks you, does it, old girl?"

"Chiefly because last week you were madly in love with Uncle Louis," I flung at her furiously.

"I just like flirting," she said. "I am a flirt, don't you understand?"

In truth I did not understand. This little devil of a girl, as pretty as a flower, was wildly popular with the men. In her honour Uncle Louis gave a fine party, which he insisted I should

attend in a white taffeta dress I considered too short for my age. Grandmother, when I consulted her, said she was not going to parties this year "because of the mourning," she explained in an acid voice, and she thought I should also refuse.

On my way to dinner in the victoria with Cousin Jacques, "the famous author", who had left his wife behind for the evening, I asked him if writing novels was amusing.

"It's a galley-slave business, my little one. It is causing me to lose my hair," he confided in a melancholy manner, and he took off his hat so as to pass a hand over the sort of downy fuzz that still lingered tenuously on his crown. "It is not so much the story which is tiring, but:

Twenty times at your craft work it over again,
From polish and polishing never refrain.

As a matter of fact I should have done much better for myself if I had simply relied on women to support me. I could have made more money and it would be much less tiring. Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "what am I telling you? I ought to be locked up."

That night in a rather well-cut dress, displaying pretty shoulders, and arms that were still somewhat slim, Françoise appeared different from ever before. Wicked Cousin Jacques could look at no one else. Poking his dissipated nose into the delicate nape of her neck he murmured, "Three things refresh the heart, water, flowers, and a beautiful girl." He seemed ready to gobble her up.

Uncle Louis at the piano was playing *La Valse Bleue* without ever glancing at the keys or anywhere except at Françoise.

My dinner partner, a stunted but distinguished-looking little viscount, did not address a word to me throughout the evening. He was occupied instead with Madame du Ruffet who seemed very interested in his attentions and kept curving her lithe body over toward the young man at every remark he made.

The room was lighted by candles lending a speciously romantic appearance to those present. Decidedly it was annoying to be so young. Nobody told me I was beautiful or that I smelled of roses. Suddenly the face of the satyr passed before my eyes. A finger of champagne gave me a dreamy feeling. Through the

open French windows I watched the firmament of stars, and my heart stirred; but in spite of the spectacle, a longing to sleep came upon me. No, that would not do! I was not a child any more! And I hurriedly helped myself to a large cup of coffee.

"Simone, what are you doing? Coffee at your age will stop you from sleeping!" exclaimed Uncle Louis.

"So much the better, that is just what I want."

Jacques took me home at three o'clock in the morning. I slept all the way with my fists tightly clenched. Grandma thought our late return scandalous and did not hide her views.

"Come now, little auntie, don't make such a stew about it. You remind me of those dragons in the nursery tales," Jacques observed coolly.

He must decidedly have been a superman, daring thus to face down the old lady when in one of her tempers.

After his departure the family resumed its former orderly dullness; the conversation lost its bantering qualities; everyone retrieved immediately his favourite complex; his fear of saying what he thought; and his dyspeptic appearance. Those poor *parpailots* certainly enjoyed boring one another.

For the fifteenth of August grandfather's foster brother, Arthur Bauge, invited us all to a junket. It was a kind of traditional affair that had taken place annually from time immemorial—I was told. Together these two old men had once shared the breasts of Bauge's mother, who was doubtless a copiously endowed peasant woman. It had been a custom to employ a wet-nurse in those days, when ladies of fashion were warned against what might prove a too vigorous suckling and the risk of toppling down their alabaster bosoms, of which they were naturally proud. In July the good Bauge had arrived hat in hand, to invite Monsieur Montigny, "my milk brother", as respectfully and proudly he always referred to grandfather. The invitation was accepted with the usual elaborate, if slightly patronizing, phrases. The old fellow was asked to stay for luncheon and distinguished himself in the end by drinking the water in his finger bowl. Grandfather had explained to him many times that this water was not for drinking purposes; but he always replied with the same excuse, "You see, Monsieur Montigny, my

milk brother, it gives me such pleasure to drink out of fine silver, it makes me feel as though I too am making wind in silk underwear."

The farm of Père Bauge was quite distant. To get there we had to start in a hurry after attending early Mass. Crowded together in several carriages, and in our best clothes at grandfather's behest, we arrived for a Lucullan feast. It was laid out beneath the trees in the apple orchard and was served by the old man's granddaughters wearing embroidered headdresses. After several hours spent in stuffing ourselves with all manner of delicious home-made dishes, and when many speeches of mutual affection had been delivered in ponderous and oversentimental fashion, we departed somnolently, waving our hands gratefully, as if to say,

"Au revoir and thanks, thanks for the party,
And for your kindness hearty."

One morning I was halted on the front steps by a voice trembling with anger and so loud that its echoes positively shook the house. Two forms escaped from the drawing-room muttering as they passed me, "It is your grandfather in one of his rages."

The members of the Protestant clan were supposed to leave before the opening of the shooting season, as grandfather maintained that they were poor shots and that he had been seeing them for too long, in any case. When his annual fit of temper occurred at the end of the summer holiday season, it simply emphasized that he had had enough of his wife's family, and if they did not leave at once he would begin smashing up the furniture.

In spite of her money and her domineering character, grandmother did not dare oppose him at that period, and sent the guests away without making an issue. "Antoine is tired," she explained to them lamely.

The flight of the *parpaillots* left the house open for a new influx of strangers. They were the friends and relations of the old gentleman.

Françoise knowingly explained: "It always happens like this at

La Touche. The religion changes with the time of year. In autumn the Catholics arrive with the coveys of partridges."

Grandfather had a "shoot" that was quite famous in the neighbourhood, and the beginning of the season brought together a number of excellent "guns". For these men this was an occasion—or rather a rule of life—which they must not and could not miss. Twice a week for three months they walked in line across broad fields, pursuing the partridges as, flushed by the dogs, they rose with a flurry of wings. There was, of course, no limit to the number they could shoot, and each day the ten guns would return with a bag varying from fifty to one hundred and fifty brace of birds, besides great numbers of rabbits and hares. The spectacle of the shoot fascinated me. The wary advance of the guns, the gamekeepers carrying the dead birds, the carriages lined with womenfolk, the lunch party with champagne and elaborate foods in the house of a peasant at noon, and the final counting and display of the game at the end of the day; all this filled me with a joy that mirrored the feeling of contentment observable on the faces of the men. Grandfather had permitted no female to take part in the shooting since the day when he had been graciously accorded the sting of several pellets in his thigh from the twelve-gauge of a pretty woman.

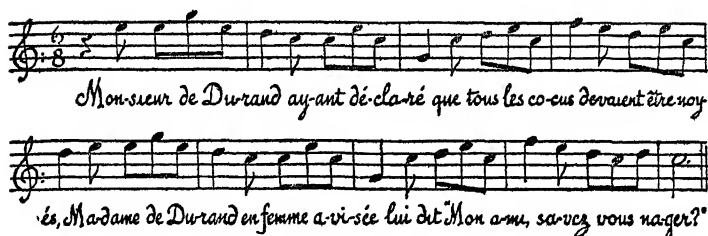
"Another hair's breadth, and I would be singing alto," he always stated in recounting the episode, so as to indicate more precisely the location of his wounds.

The banging of guns and the plummeting of partridges in every direction aroused in me a desire to try the little twenty-two rifle grandfather had bought me. I began on a target, but it was a tedious business, and soon I engaged in practice on nobler game, until Miss Hayes stopped me, remarking, "You are breaking too many window-panes. It would be better if you went and picked mushrooms."

I departed, therefore, swinging a large wicker basket on my arm, and, since the family was out of earshot, whistling a little hunting song that was forbidden.

Monsieur de Durant declared with a frown,
"Cuckolds ev'rywhere should certainly drown."

Madame de Durant looked archly at him,
And said, "But mon cher, how well can you swim?"
(Tally-ho, Tally-ho!)



On the road I met Monsieur de Loches in his English cart. He pulled up immediately and exclaimed as I approached, "Good morning, my pretty little savage."

"Good morning, monsieur," I replied, without stopping.

"Where are you going with your basket?"

"To gather mushrooms."

"Jump in with me," he suggested amiably.

"No, indeed, I don't want to go anywhere," I said in a fright.

"Rosy apple, my pretty child, are you not looking for mushrooms?"

"Yes, but to find them one must go on foot, Monsieur de Loches."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" and he got off the cart. Catching up with me he took my basket and added, "Let's look for them in the little copse."

Disconcerted, I stared at him. Suddenly, before I could even cry out, he seized and kissed me violently. A few moments later he left, and enjoined me to be there at the same time next day. Françoise is not the only one to have lovers, I thought, as I returned home, still astonished by my adventure. Straining my imagination, I invented excuses for appearing without a single mushroom. No doubt because I had been pleased with his compliments, I was back the next day at the rendezvous.

"I adore you my little apple. There is nothing more beautiful in the world than youth," he flattered me enchantingly.

I did not lose my head, however, and replied, "That is very

pretty, but today I must bring back some mushrooms, or they will ask what I have been dreaming about in the forest."

He started roaring with laughter. "Your head is screwed on your shoulders all right, little girl," and he helped fill my basket in great haste. Then, as the day before, he began to kiss me again in a sort of exasperated frenzy. He made me promise, before he let me go, that I would write him to a mailbox number at Mazières. Indeed, Miss Hayes and I were leaving the next day, and it was our good-bye meeting—a circumstance of which he took advantage with many extra kisses.

When I reached the house, I hastened to the mirror in my bedroom to see whether there was any noticeable change in my face. On the bed I saw my old doll Bonnie, now become much dilapidated after so many years of tender attention. Turning to Miss Hayes I said, "You can pack Bonnie away, I don't care to play with dolls any more."

My governess looked at me curiously, but without making any remark. Thus it was that Bonnie disappeared from my life.

In the train which brought us to Paris it was evident that I could no longer be fascinated by the adventures of Nick Carter—gentleman burglar. All the time my thoughts kept flying back to La Touche where I had left so much to be remembered. There was grandfather whom I loved, and grandmother, less disagreeable than I had expected, after all, and there were my first passionate kisses. Miss Hayes, huddled in a corner, was reading a novel of Paul Bourget. It had to do with "love", that new world which explained perhaps the beating of my heart. I pitied the old Englishwoman, who obviously knew nothing concerning this important subject.

The apartment in Paris was no longer the same. Papa had moved up under the roof. "There is a better view," he pointed out at once, "and it is also smaller. How did you enjoy your summer? Why did you not write oftener?" he inquired. "You say there was so much to do at La Touche? It must have changed a lot. It is true that when I used to stay there with your mother the *parpaillots* were not invited," he went on reflectively.

"Well, papa, they are really not so bad when you understand them. They discuss interesting topics. At any rate, I don't know why, but I had an excellent time at La Touche this summer."

The convent, which I was now to enter as a regular day boarder, required the wearing of a uniform, high shoes, and black cotton stockings which had to be bought at the Bon Marché. It was quite a business securing all I needed, but at last father took me to meet the headmistress, Mademoiselle Spanker, a perfect name, I thought, for her profession. In the reception room there were stiff chairs set against the wall, giving the place a hard, ecclesiastical appearance. On the polished parquet floor were spread squares of green flannel. The nun who acted as receptionist instructed us to place our feet one on each square and slide the flannel along beneath when walking, as if we were on skis. She explained that this system was adopted so as to keep the floor clean.

"It's a fine way to smash your mug," father growled in a low voice.

"I beseech you, father, please don't say such things, just imagine if they heard you!"

Mademoiselle Spanker arrived at last. She was a distinguished-looking lady in a white blouse, and not at all of the convent type. We soon found out that she directed the social end of the establishment. She proceeded to inform us of the high quality of her clientele, running off for our benefit a string of important-sounding names among the pupils.

"It is the fine flower of Parisian virgins," father laughed, as we were returning in the car.

Early in the morning on the opening day of school, Miss Hayes arranged my hair in a new style, according to printed instructions that came in a notice from the convent. I rather liked the black bow on top, resembling a large butterfly; but I did not enjoy the high collar sawing at my neck. The first day seemed endless. The girl sitting next to me was of the bossy type. On the pretext of having been at school already for a year, she tried to harass me, complaining that I made too much noise with my desk top and annoying me with her fussiness about doing everything just so. She did not realize what a terror little Simone could be, but in a few days when I had pulled her hair

and pinched her sufficiently, our positions became exactly reversed. Soon she was sneaking off on all occasions to report me to the teacher—a lady who appeared tired of life in general and of me in particular.

With most of the other girls I got along well. Having always been so much in company with grown-ups, this was really my first experience with persons of my own age. I enjoyed the give-and-take of that miniature society. Soon, though younger and smaller than many, I had forged my way to the position of dominance that suited me.

After school, at home in the evening, I fell asleep almost immediately, worn out by a game we played each day, called "Au Drapeau". It was a kind of strategic conflict between the French and the English in which Wellington was not always successful. In a short time I was accorded the coveted rôle of Napoleon, and directed the battle with a confident vigour that would surely have won the Emperor's approval—and even envy. With the cry, "The guard dies and never surrenders!" I earned the admiration and loyalty of my generals; but it was perhaps my crosswise style of wearing the bow in my hair, and the way I carried my hand thrust resolutely into my blouse in the authentic Napoleonic attitude, that inspired my army with the highest devotion.

It was due to these activities that my catechism did not receive the attention it required. On the last Sunday of term I had to come and spend the day at the convent, learning the catechism as a punishment. It was clearly the weak spot in my education. I had never been to vespers before, but this time I had to go. It seemed extremely long, boring, and useless. From an old nun who acted as watchwoman I inquired after the ceremony if it were always like that on Sundays. The next day I was sent for urgently by the directress and was asked, without mincing matters, "How many times in your life have you been to vespers?"

"Yesterday for the first time, ma mère."

"What is the religion of your parents?"

"Catholic, of course, ma mère."

"It seems inconceivable," she replied in a disgusted manner. The convent food had appeared terrible to me from the day

when one of my young friends told me that there were caterpillars in the salad and that we were being served horseflesh. Miss Hayes noticed that I was becoming a sort of epicure, paying great attention lately to the dishes Tata gave us for dinner, and questioning whether the salad had been washed properly. I did not explain what was worrying me.

From Touraine I got some news: Françoise no longer mentioned that she would be back before the next holidays; grandfather wrote to say he was missing me, and that he had an attack of rheumatism. With some difficulty I managed to mail a few postcards addressed to Monsieur de Loches. The weeks passed monotonously until Christmas. Papa went to England to stay with his friend Sir Ronald for the fox hunting, and his absence gave me the feeling that the whole house was slumbering. On several successive Mondays, Miss Hayes took me to the opera, where Aunt Adèle had a box that was frequently unoccupied.

Although we were bedecked in our finest evening dresses, with our hair carefully curled, and wearing long white kid gloves, we remained in the darkened rear of the box, and only ventured forward during the entr'actes to cast curious eyes over the heavily jewelled audience. On this particular day in the week, the illustrious and the would-be famous packed in until the last seat was filled. To me it seemed that this was a reunion of all the glory of the world. Unfortunately, Miss Hayes could not put a name to any of those languorous sirens, nor to the starched white shirts standing so proudly behind them. It was depressing, as I knew that we were viewing the very cream of the nobility. In the small black pockets of the corner boxes we could see slender arms, gloved in suède, holding lorgnettes levelled on a house glittering in the bright illumination with constellations of gems that were every one of them genuine. The day of fake prosperity had not yet been invented.

That season I heard the greatest tenors and the most miraculous divas sing as if their hearts would break, but they failed to keep me awake for the second act. Miss Hayes took care to rouse me to watch the ballet, which I loved, and was distressed at my lack of musical appreciation. "The singing is so beautiful," she said.

"They all look like idiots," I replied while crunching candy held in a pair of tongs, so as not to spoil my expensive gloves.

During the summer our apartment had been redecorated by a ruthless person who evidently sought to drown us in a sea of lace. Our window curtains, our cushions, our table tops were covered with it. I thought the place looked very modern, Miss Hayes was thrilled by the effect. The curtains and hangings of the drawing-room had been changed to yellow damask. Father had ordered constructed for himself a luxurious bathroom. It was his turn now to pose as Apollo of the Belvedere. My governess had her own room while for my use there had been installed in our little salon a new kind of bed, called a divan, covered in the daytime with many cushions that cluttered up the room at night. The guests had also not been forgotten, and two rooms were laid out for them with a bath between. Miss Hayes and I took possession of this bath three times a week.

Shortly before Christmas papa returned from England, simply delighted with his stay. Sir Ronald had treated him like a king; and his tailor in Sackville Street had succeeded so well with his suits that he was still gaping before his cheval glass in admiration. He kept repeating that the English tailors had their brains at the end of their fingers while with French tailors it was at the end of their tongues—a less satisfactory location in his opinion.

Father had scarcely got home when he telephoned Bertrand de Sâblon to inform him that he was no longer in love with Charlotte.

"Charlotte?" Who can that be? I wondered. I suppose all this took place when I was at La Touche.

His friend gave vent to such cries of despair that papa was forced to hold the receiver away from his ear. "Keep calm, old boy, I beg you. What do you expect me to do? I don't love her any more. I know she is a charming girl; there was a time, you remember, when I considered her the most delightful sample of femininity I had ever known. I was madly in love, of course, but somehow it is difficult to share a woman, and then she is really too expensive. It is distressing, of course, to leave her on your hands like this, but, between you and me, we who know everyone in Paris can surely find someone to take my place and

help you support her. As a matter of fact, I have brought back with me a ravishing little English show-girl, named Flossie. She is not yet spoiled by easy living."

Monsieur de Sâblon hurried over the same evening to get more detailed explanations. In a bitter voice he complained to me, "Your father is a real quitter. He has played me the worst kind of a dirty trick, the dear man."

I did not dare ask him for further enlightenment.

Since mother's death the telephone seemed to have taken a large place in papa's life. Now it was his habit to remain for hours at a time glued to the receiver while he discussed his doings at the top of his voice. This kept me night and day in touch with the smallest events that affected him. It was this Charlotte woman, I perceived, who had been responsible for the lacy rejuvenation of our home. I was glad the affair had terminated, but dreaded the new English menace.

For Christmas I was permitted, in spite of my mourning, to attend several Christmas-tree entertainments and parties. "She has worked so hard this term, the poor little thing," was the excuse my governess offered.

At one of the parties I met Miss Josephine, a sister of Miss Hayes, with a young girl pupil. I thought her charge delightful, and invited them to come to tea at once. My governess pointed out to me that I should have first consulted my father about it.

"That would not be worth while, the poor man knows nothing of such matters," I replied disrespectfully. "Furthermore, I want to ask your other sister, Miss Phyllis, with her pupil too."

"You are mad, really," Miss Hayes cried in a fright. "While your mother was alive she explained to me, with considerable tact, I admit, that there could be no question of your ever associating with the daughter of people in the business world."

"That is nutty," I said in a rage.

"Simone, please don't use vulgar expressions for which you could be criticized," wailed the old Englishwoman.

Miss Hayes woke me up one day with a sore throat, compelling her to remain in bed several days. Gérard had come back to Paris for the holidays, and spent his time with me in the large drawing-room, which had now become my heritage as father kept entirely to his study and library. We played various

After dinner I suggested to her sympathetically that she was tired.

"It is quite true," she admitted, "it is so sweet of you to take an interest in me. If you don't mind, shall we go to bed early?"

In a short time the slight whistling noise she made at night assured me that she was no longer awake. With catlike tread, in my dressing-gown I crept down the staircase to the third floor, where Gérard was waiting for me. We sat down on a step, and I asked what it was he wanted to tell me.

He put his arm round my waist and kissed me in the back of my neck. I must have betrayed considerable amazement.

In anger he exclaimed, "Why do you look at me like an idiot?"

"Don't you think, Gérard, that you are acting like a womanizer?"

He laughed and said, "Why, no, my little cabbage, I love you, that is all."

A noise at the front door made us pack off in a hurry. On the alert for spies we climbed up to another floor and when the danger had passed returned.

It was only "the sixty-year-old ingénue", as father called the lessee of the first floor, maliciously. She was one of the most famous associates of the Comédie Française, and seemed still young and pretty, with her eternal, mocking smile. She had astonished me a lot one day when I saw her parting from a foreign lady, and noticed that they embraced each other in a very funny way.

"Don't worry, Gérard," I said, "it is only *la Divine*."

"Listen, silly," he went on, already recovered from his emotion, "I am going to give you something."

"A present? What for?"

"Because I adore you. For six months I have been saving my pocket money. Now I have a gift for my darling Biquette." He gave point to the statement with another kiss on my cheek, and produced from his pocket a small white cardboard box which he handed me with a happy smile.

"Is it really possible?" I exclaimed in admiration. "A ring with a gold heart!"

"I found it at Jersey. It is the engagement ring of the Bretons, because, you see, Biquette, I will marry you some day."

We made many naïve confessions, solemn promises, and endless plans; separating with our thoughts in such a complicated tangle that we forgot to kiss each other good-bye.

Sneaking back to the apartment on tiptoe, I thought: There is no doubt about it, this is the life of a romantic heroine. It's like this in the films.

In connection with my finger ring, father was making inquiries from Miss Hayes a few days later. She explained to him, in a slightly sarcastic manner, "It was Gérard de Pont-Leroy who gave it to her. They are expecting to get married, I understand."

"Really? She would do better to marry the son of a millionaire grocer. Cash counts in these days," father declared.

"I will only marry an elegant young man of the aristocracy," I exclaimed in dignified tones.

Just a week before I had to return to school, Uncle Ballou arrived without warning. "I was not expecting you, uncle," I cried at seeing him.

"It is just a little surprise to please you," said father smiling.

A few days later our entrance hall was filled with suitcases that were as highly polished as walking-shoes. There was no doubt about it, the English noble was on hand. It was he in fact who entered shortly, and kissed me affectionately, at the same time drawing out of his pocket a manicure set in blond tortoise-shell he had bought for me at Asprey's. I flung my arms round his neck with unmixed joy.

Suddenly Uncle Louis was announced. As he had no longer an apartment in Paris, he wanted to stay with us. Father was delighted with the idea. There was no doubt that with him, friends were more than a hobby. "Friendship is my greatest vice; when I get used to someone I can no longer do without them," he often remarked. "The question does not arise of sending Monsieur Louis de Sizy to a hotel," he told Alice. And she had to find a brass bed, so as to transform father's dressing-room into a comfortable place to sleep his dear friend.

Grumbling, she complained, "Life is worse now, since the death of Madame la Comtesse. Everybody is giving orders; it's like a madhouse. The only way to stop these gentlemen from

coming to stay with Monsieur le Comte is to put a sign reading MUMPS on the outside door."

As we were still in mourning, there were numberless small intimate parties at home. I did not appear at these for various reasons, but chiefly because of the kind of ladies invited. Though chosen for their beauty, they completely lacked social position. I heard their uncouth accents from my room without being able to see their persons.

When I went back to school, I found my desk had been changed in the classroom, and I was now seated in the back row between a dark Argentine girl and Christine de Birieu, the best-behaved pupil in the convent. She never did a thing that was forbidden and won all the good-conduct ribbons. The Argentine was much more to my liking and spent all her time eating candies that she shared with me generously. My real friends were never among the prize-winners, as I had a marked preference for the bad characters. The teachers referred to us as "boys who have failed as boys".

In March, when the awards were read out, I was accorded to my astonishment, the blue ribbon for the best pupil of the month. In a daze I went to the desk of the headmistress to receive it. As she was pinning it on, Mademoiselle Spanker remarked, in a voice that was scarcely tender, "We had to give you this ribbon because during the month of February the whole class has been down with influenza, and you are the only one to qualify with a sufficient number of hours."

Naturally I did not communicate this detail to my family. In the evening, when my governess saw the ribbon displayed on my breast, she inquired anxiously if I had stolen it. She was under no illusions.

"Really, Miss Hayes, what do you take me for?"

Papa was so impressed that he immediately drew a hundred-franc note from his pocketbook and handed it to me with his compliments.

The next day during the rest period I ran over to the chapel and lit a candle to my favourite saint. "Saint Anthony of Padua, you who find everything for us on earth, do not desert me. Now that without merit on my part you have found a hundred francs for me, pray don't let the other girls in the class get well.

Please keep them sick. Here are two francs, on account, for your poor people and I will give you two more if you can manage to continue this business for me in a satisfactory manner."

I used to meet Françoise on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. We walked together in the Avenue du Bois mercilessly dissecting everyone in the school. But our conversation regarding her début did not excite me. It was several years off; it seemed, however, that she had already determined what flowers to hold in her hands, and which man she would choose that night for her future husband.

As for me, I was not concerned about the flowers, but the man had been already selected for a long time. He was an attractive friend of my father, called "Lou". This gentleman was dark and handsome. He always wore a red carnation in his button-hole. Unfortunately, instead of interesting himself in me, he continued to escort, as he had for fifteen years, a princess with a title no older than the Empire—a lady who gave many parties.

Toward the middle of the winter, Sir Ronald and papa left for Monte Carlo together. The Englishman went there every year to take part in the live-pigeon shooting, as this was a sport at which he excelled. It was a diversion that distressed me, being unable to comprehend what pleasure he got out of massacring the poor creatures in all their innocence of man's treachery.

When they said good-bye to Uncle Ballou, the two in chorus warned him to be careful. "You are playing a dangerous game with that woman in the North, her husband is simply a jealous bourgeois. He understands nothing of our way of life. You would do better to get married," they advised.

"A wife means clothes," Ballou said curtly.

"Well, don't get yourself assassinated, that is all I ask of you," father replied, giving him an affectionate slap on the back.

At Easter-time I went quite frequently for a promenade in the Bois with Miss Hayes and on fine Sunday mornings with my father. Through a chance meeting, it was there that I introduced him to the mother of Françoise, who was engaged in walking her fox terrier. Papa proposed to take her home in his car, and to this she acceded with pleasure. That afternoon, speaking about her with his friend Sâblon, he confided: "She is quite

pretty, for a woman of her age—a little past her prime, of course, but she's not faded, you know."

This surprised me a lot, as I had heard him repeating over and over to mother that a woman is completely finished at thirty.

Changing the subject, he then continued concerning Charlotte, with whom one of his friends had lately fallen in love: "*There* is something that will surely delight you, my dear Bertrand. Those sables must have proved a heavy drain on your resources. Well, love is a beautiful thing, old man."

On his way back to England, Sir Ronald stopped for three days in Paris. He complained that he had lost a lot of money at baccarat, and to top off his troubles the husband of a pretty woman he had flushed one day caught them in bed together and had insisted on a contribution of two thousand pounds in cash—to prevent an excessive scandal.

"It's an unlucky year," father sympathized, touching wood.

A few days after the meeting in the Bois, Madame du Ruffet asked us to lunch at the house of her aunt, Madame de Granville. Papa accepted immediately in spite of a remark he had made to me some time before when he said, "Your young friend is charming, but her mother's reputation is slim. They say she has affairs."

I had inquired of Françoise why her father did not reside with them. It would look better if he did, I suggested.

"What an idea!" she replied; "my parents cannot get along. Father loses all his money playing poker or at the races, which makes mother furious, while she spends her time flirting and that makes him howl, also. You see it is impossible," she concluded. Her short explanation clarified the matter perfectly.

At exactly one o'clock papa and I, both of us starched and polished to the queen's taste, entered the drawing-room of Madame de Granville. I had already been to this house where the Ruffets were living with their rich and elderly relative. Apparently she had more or less adopted them.

Papa bowed and kissed the hands of the ladies, while Nicole du Ruffet murmured, "Aunt Marie has been wanting to know you so much, Monsieur d'Entremont. It is curious that we never met through Antoinette. She and I were childhood friends."

Father assured them, that it was curious, "*and very regret-*

table," he added warmly, screwing his monocle in his eye so as to let fly a gallant and tender glance at the charming woman.

At lunch father seemed to delight the ladies with his witty remarks; but I left before it was over, as Miss Hayes came to fetch Françoise and me to take us to the circus.

A few weeks later, papa confided to a friend: "My English girl Flossie has returned to London. I was sick and tired of her. Just imagine, she drank pure gin and smoked cigarettes. . . . Yes, she was pretty, but unmanageable. She was out day and night with shady characters, dancing the tango with Argentines and that sort of thing. It is sad to think how women can deceive you. She seemed so extremely innocent. I felt that if I were not her first affair I had been very close to taking from her that on which all mankind sets such store in young women. As a matter of fact, I adored the girl; she was an angel, I thought. I loved her desperately. Now I have decided that I prefer women of the world, especially if they don't care to dance.

The time for my first communion was drawing close, and Miss Hayes took me on three successive Thursdays to try my white dress. After a considerable struggle I succeeded in getting permission to have rosebud pompons on my bonnet.

"They make you look like a married woman," the old Miss remarked indignantly.

That was precisely what I desired; to have the appearance of being twenty years old, with my white veil and my long skirt.

One evening I had got into the dress to make certain of the last details when Adrien came to say that father wanted me in the drawing-room. "Monsieur le Comte would like to see you in the whole battery for your communion," explained Adrien.

There were guests for dinner, and Miss Hayes' lips tightened grimly—a sure sign that she did not approve. In the smoking-room I found father, surrounded by friends. There were: Henri Pierson, who since mother's death came quite often, leaning on the arm of a footman since the poor man was paralyzed; Monsieur de Sâblon with his ever cynical smile; Monsieur de Laborie, an explorer, on his way shortly to the Belgian Congo; Monsieur Chabot, an old bachelor who was always grumbling about modern dances and their rhythm, which he could never grasp

in spite of constant lessons; and finally, there were five young women, decked out much too elegantly, who looked at me in silence. One of them got up and approached with an outstretched hand. I must have had a severe expression, because she retired backwards and immediately gave up the idea of trying to cajole me. Everybody, however, in very polite fashion remarked how pretty I was.

But that did not settle matters. Turning on my heels with a brief "Good night," spoken in a disdainful voice, I left the room without the smallest curtsy, and banged the door behind me. Subsequently papa did not dare scold me for my bad manners.

Madame du Ruffet was now taking many of her meals and passing a large part of her time at our house. Sâblon had told her about the glance I had bestowed on all that "high-class poultry".

"The little girl has more sense than you, Maxence," she remarked. "Furthermore, I insist you give up entertaining creatures like that."

As a result the jackal laughter, which had recently been disturbing our peace, was completely stilled. Tata, reviewing the matter, approved highly. "It is lucky Madame du Ruffet took charge of our patron. Without her no one knows how he would have ended up, with all those fearful *grues* from the Bal Tabarin."

When mother died she left a great quantity of jewellery that was divided in two parts and sold, but her furs had escaped from the control of the notary. They had been put away with her lace and personal affairs in large wicker trunks heavily sprinkled with pepper and naphtha to keep the moths away.

For my communion, an ermine stole that was slightly yellowed had been unpacked so as to protect my shoulders during the afternoon in the grounds of the convent. It was a rainy day, and this somewhat spoiled the procession we made around the lawns. Beneath streaming umbrellas, half-drowned in the deluge, we sang canticles while our heads were filled with the mystical dreams of little girls taking a significant step in life, and with the deep voice of the chapel organ.

At the shop of Bouasse-Lebel, a dealer in religious articles, papa selected the design for the cards I would send out to an-



nounce my first communion. It represented exactly his idea of the proper way to treat the Devil. Saint Michael in full armour, mounted on a prancing war-horse, was thrusting a spear through the body of the dragon, Satan. I thought it elegant; but Miss Hayes would have preferred a card with the Infant Jesus in the arms of the Holy Virgin, the whole surrounded by white lilies.

I distributed these cards lavishly to the number of two hundred among my friends, my relations, and the servants. Our entire family was there for the ceremony as well as Uncle Louis, Monsieur Pierson, mother's friends and my own; not to speak of my grandfather, magnificent with his top hat and his pegtop trousers in black-and-white checks. Grandmother, beside him, haughtily surveyed Madame du Ruffet, who was wearing mother's sables "to air them", as she said. Everyone came on afterwards to join us for sumptuous refreshments. On a table were displayed the presents I had received. Among other things there was a gold watch in the shape of a heart, that Monsieur and Madame de Loches had sent me from Touraine.

"A very amiable thought," father observed in surprise when he opened the package.

In return I sent them, without comment, one of my communion cards with the avenging Saint Michael.

The cushions and curtains in lace all vanished soon from our apartment. Madame du Ruffet had inundated father with sarcasm on the subject. "Your woman of the demimonde, Charlotte, had very doubtful taste," she stated. "I am astonished, anyway, that you allowed your place to be invaded by such tinselled tartlets."

"I beg you, Nicole, please spare me your jealous remarks," said father, finally resentful of her ceaseless reproaches.

Mother's sables were still requiring an airing. After dinner their fine sheen continued to glisten on the shoulders of Madame du Ruffet, and seemed to harmonize beautifully with her ash-blonde hair. It was not difficult to believe her claim that she was only sixteen when her daughter was born. She looked so very young—by candlelight.

Father, it appeared, was taking her to the theatre that evening with another couple to see *Chanticleer*. The play, as it turned

out, had a peculiar effect on papa, whose ironical sense of humour was of the finest. For several days thereafter he was constantly uttering the cries of domestic animals, explaining that though he might be *un cochon de payant*, he did not grant Edmond Rostand the right to take advantage of him in consequence.

At the celebration of my first communion there had been one notable absentee: Uncle Ballou had gone to Brussels to accompany surreptitiously his "Northern lady", as Uncle Louis described her in a mocking way. I received a letter telling how desolated he was not to be near me on the finest day of my life.

Perhaps to make up for this, he sent a postcard to father of a small boy making water in the basin of a fountain. His communication set forth that, "In this town they piss water and drink excellent wine."

When I discovered the postcard while Miss Hayes was looking, it was necessary to tear it up, my governess declaring that the photo of the celebrated "Manikin Piss" was "offensive".

We began talking of the long summer vacation. Miss Hayes had received bad news from England. Her brother, a Catholic priest, wrote to say that his housemaid had died. He was testing the ground to see if Mary, his favourite sister, would be willing to come and live with him.

"Don't think about it for a moment," I said furiously as she read over the letter. "There is nobody else in the world to take care of me, except three very devoted men, of course, but they know nothing about bringing up a girl of my age. You have often said so yourself . . ."

To tell the truth, it was not so easy for her either, to watch over a spoiled child, who was always in contact with the amazing problems that encumbered the lives of those old boys.

"Let us discuss the question of the holidays all together," Nicole du Ruffet suggested to my father, with an angelic smile.

It was a proposal that produced an exceedingly poor response from Françoise, who remained sulky for the rest of the evening.

Father said he would go to Marienbad as usual for his thinning cure. According to his calculation, he had about forty pounds to take off.

"You will kill yourself at that business," all his friends warned him.

But he laughed at the idea. In the back of his head he could not forget his maternal grandmother who had allowed herself while still young to become obese, and could no longer get through the doors of carriages or into train compartments. Eventually she had to have a special railroad car constructed for her use. Father, who took after her, considered it less costly to watch his weight—though it was always excessive.

Madame du Ruffet in a voice that admitted no reply set forth what the Entremonts should do that summer. "This is what I have decided: Maxence, you will have twenty-five days for your cure, and then you will join us at Ingouville."

At this, Papa regarded her sarcastically, with an eye that seemed to say, "Wait a minute, my beauty, we are not married yet." After a short pause he replied courteously, "I should like very much to come to your house this summer, but unfortunately I have accepted an invitation to stay with Louis de Sizy during August, and later on I have told Anne de Chaslout that she can count on me."

"You are always at her house," Nicole exclaimed, somewhat angrily.

"She is an old friend."

"An old friend! I call her an old mistress."

Papa coughed and, looking at us in some embarrassment, remarked, "Have you ever noticed what a beautiful bird the peacock is?"

Before I was sent to bed he explained, when we were alone, "Nicole is like the King of France: if she says 'we' she means 'I'." Then, talking half to himself, he continued, "I don't like tactless women. Antoinette knew how to handle things perfectly, without appearing so to do. The poor little thing used to say, 'In my opinion we should do such and such.' Because she had excellent judgment she was always right. Can you imagine me staying with the Ruffets at Ingouville this summer? It would make all the evil tongues wag between here and Navarre. What a pretty scandal!"

"Papa, are you going to marry Madame du Ruffet?" I asked slightly worried.

"Certainly not!" he cried in horror. "Certainly not, what a question! You give me gooseflesh. To begin with, her marriage is not annulled, the sweet girl, and never will be, please God."

When he kissed me good night, I went to bed in perplexity. I could not understand the matter. Madame du Ruffet wore mother's furs, was always at the house, or was talking on the telephone with father by the hour. He called her "my darling", and yet behind her back he was horrified at the idea of marrying her. It seemed to me that the poor man was a little mad.

During the hour of recess at school the next day, I asked Françoise, "Why did you have a face a mile long all last evening?"

She explained to me bitterly that her mother's life distressed her. "You cannot imagine how annoying it is to see a new face in the house every six months."

Whatever was she talking about? I wondered.

"Mother changes her loves too often, you see. During the last four years I have seen more than five admirers who have sat in the salon with us discussing the problems of our family. Nothing could be more depressing than these substitutions of faces which are gone just as one is getting used to them. Not only that, but it is bad for my reputation. People might say, 'like mother, like daughter'. It is not dignified. If it were not for Aunt Granville, who has money and protects us against the world, nobody would care to see mother."

"Do you think your mother will ever get an annulment?" I asked her in some anxiety.

"Auntie is doing everything she can to help her obtain one; but papa does not care about it, though he's disgusted with marriage, the dear man."

Considering the matter, it seemed to me that my father was not so foolish, after all, for being terrified at the idea of marrying pretty Madame du Ruffet; but why in that case did he address her in such a compromising manner as "my little darling", and sometimes even more endearingly. When a friend remarked, "Maxence, you ought to marry again," he replied, "I am not a marrying man. Marriage and I don't make good partners. If I were to wed an affectionate woman who really loved me, I should make her unhappy. Formerly I was married

to a charming creature who allowed me complete liberty, but even then I was not satisfied. My habits are bad; I don't like to be annoyed. In fact, when it comes to marriage, I am the genuine type of old bachelor with fear and with reproach. Anyway, for a couple to live happily together, the husband must be deaf and the wife blind."

In spite of everything, Nicole was in my opinion a fine woman, provided, of course, that she did not marry father. She had actually declared, after an interview with Miss Hayes, that I needed new clothes for the summer as well as a party dress and a coat in English style—and these in fact she bought for me without awaiting father's approval. When she had finished her purchases, I looked like a grown-up girl. Papa was shocked when he saw the effect, and hurrying over to a mirror murmured, "How time flies; my temples are already white."

The day before the start of the holidays, there was a distribution of prizes that took so long I got pins-and-needles while they were placing laurel wreaths on the heads of my friends. Made-moiselle Spanker also offered us excellent refreshments, and we were allowed as much hot chocolate as we wanted, together with some wonderful apricot tart. It was a real festival. I left feeling a little sick to my stomach, and with only a single prize—for literature.

When papa saw it he addressed me teasingly, "Are you, by any chance, becoming a future Ponson du Terrail, the famous author of novels for shopgirls?"

As I shut my desk with a bang, I shouted to Arlette de Vauçoy, a friend I liked well, "Au revoir, old girl, it's fine to go away for the holidays."

"Speak for yourself," she replied without a smile. "I hate going home. It's deadly boring and everyone is endlessly bawling at me."

Decidedly the sampler Miss Hayes had just finished embroidering with "Home, Sweet Home" in cross-stitch, could scarcely be hung convincingly on every wall. We had got our trunks almost ready when the door opened and Gérard appeared. Running over to him I fell into his arms, at which my governess, quite shocked, exclaimed, "Simone, please control your enthusiasm!"

Gérard had just arrived from Jersey and was catching a train

to go to his property at Tusac. He had rushed in to hug me, he said.

• "Now, why didn't you write me for my communion?" I asked him reproachfully.

"I sent you a long letter."

"Never received it," I remarked disappointedly.

"The Jesuit censorship swallowed it, I suppose. What infuriating people they are! It makes no difference even if they have educated me, I cannot endure them."

"Mother felt the same way about the Jesuits."

He had brought me another present. It was a little gold pin.

"Really, Gérard, you are ruining yourself for me."

"It is a pleasure. Tell me, have you seen the old satyr lately?" he asked anxiously.

"No, but he had the nerve to send me a watch, in the shape of a heart, for my first communion."

"That was a fine thing to do," he said scornfully. "Anyway, be sure not to speak to him this summer. I don't like the idea of knowing that you are staying with Monsieur de Sizy next door to the Loches."

I reassured him, saying, "You need not worry. I believe that Françoise has made him forget me by now. He took her to dine at Voisin's with her mother the last time he passed through Paris."

"That suits me better," said my young admirer with satisfaction, as he kissed me tenderly, at the same time clasping tightly a photograph I had just given him of myself in my communion dress.

Before leaving Paris I telephoned Cathy to tell her I was going to Touraine, and to say how much I regretted not having seen her since she had got back from Egypt. From what she confided to me, her life had become almost unendurable as she was allowed no visitors except her nurse and the family.

"I cannot understand it," I said sympathetically. In truth, I was the only one who did not know the situation. A series of French, Swiss, English, and German specialists kept filing into "29" and emerged shaking their heads with the verdict that it was tuberculosis of the bones.

Madame du Ruffet seemed to like family parties and asked us to travel with her to Touraine. We got up at five in the morning to catch the seven-o'clock train at the Gare d'Orsay. Miss Hayes undertook to register our trunks, and did it without complaining, though great drops of sweat poured off her face from a heat that was already overpowering. During the trip Nicole tried to teach me something about bridge, under the disapproving eye of my governess, who dreaded all games of chance. We left the train at Langeais, in the shadow of the ancient château, and found the yellow omnibus of Laufleur waiting for us there. Huddled amidst hat-boxes, valises, and dog-baskets, piled over and under us, we arrived in an exhausted condition at Ingouville, where Françoise and her mother got out with their impedimenta amid affectionate kisses.

When they were gone, Miss Hayes was of the opinion that they did not know how to travel. "Just imagine if they had been with us in Egypt, it would have been a pretty how-d'ye-do."

Looking at what remained in the bus, and remembering the vast mountains of excess luggage on our African expedition, I could not help laughing. We were not much better than the Ruffets, I thought.

Uncle Louis received us with delight at Laufleur. "You have sprouted like asparagus, my little angel. Miss Hayes, you are most welcome."

He showed us to some rooms so large as to make up for what my poor governess had endured at La Touche during the previous summer.

"I feel like the Queen of Sheba!" she exclaimed in awe, stunned at the voluptuous bed she would occupy.

My uncle had recently redecorated our rooms in cretonne, adorned with eighteenth-century figures. Since the death of his mother he was fixing up the place to suit himself. "Straw by straw the bird builds its nest," he remarked gravely. "Now I am going slowly and with care, as I have the time to decide on each detail."

The next morning, when we came down for breakfast in the dining-room, I was much surprised to find the house full of flowers.

Delighted by my appreciation, he confessed that he had talked at length with Jules, the gardener, on the subject, and had explained to him that I had been brought up in homes that were smothered in flowers, and he did not want to fail me in this respect.

It was true that mother used to spend much of her time arranging flowers, and I have never known anyone who succeeded so well in getting charming effects at a period when that art was really unknown. She used to remark to me, "A house without flowers is like a soul in torment."

Jules had set to work with my uncle's encouragement, and had planted a new bank of flowers in front of the château, making a wonderfully attractive effect when one drove up to the front door. As he knew how much I liked the perfume of mignonette, he kept fresh pots of it in my room all through the summer. My uncle, in fact, now that I was staying in his home, was entertaining me superbly.

We were invited for lunch at La Touche that same day to see my grandparents again, and we found them surrounded by guests, as usual. Dressed in pearly grey, with a white parasol over her head, grandmother received us on the front perron looking devilishly majestic as a châtelaine, but reminding me of a satisfied pouter pigeon attended by an assortment of barnyard fowls. Grandfather appeared much older and was leaning on a cane to relieve a recent attack of gout. After lunch he led us to the stable, where he hinted mysteriously that there was a surprise for me. Arriving at the box-stall of a horse he had just purchased, named "Mister Lucas", the good man offered the animal to me.

"It is your birthday present, my dear."

I was awe-struck with such generosity, but while covering grandpa with kisses I could not help regretting in my heart the poor old horse I had last year, who had permitted himself to die of old age.

Zut! I thought. If I claim that Mister Lucas has run away with me it won't be a deception this time.

Uncle Louis invited the Ruffets for dinner, and they were delighted to see him again. His eyebrows frowned when Nicole told at table, without making any bones about it, how father had

written her describing everything he was doing at Marienbad. Her dress that evening was of dark blue taffeta surmounted around the neck by a sort of shawl of Valenciennes lace. In spite of myself I could not help recalling that I had seen that lace somewhere. There was no doubt in my mind that papa had bought it for maman a short time before she died, and the gift was accompanied by such a flood of generous phrases that she had remarked sarcastically, "Really, my dear Maxence, when you get me the slightest little thing you make such a ceremony of it one would think you were bestowing the imperial jewels of Russia."

During the entire evening, my uncle pursued Françoise with lovelorn attentions, and gave the impression of being badly smitten with her. "She is awfully pretty," he remarked when the Ruffets had left, "but it will be hard for her to find someone to settle down with, her mother being the way she is."

Here is still another one, I thought, in love and with no idea of getting married. The men of my family are consistent, at any rate.

Life at Laufleur was somewhat calm. Louis always had much to do managing his estate during the summer, and could not invite friends to stay who required particularly his attention. One day he took Françoise and me to the fair at Segré. We started off the three of us squeezed together in his cabriolet, with Françoise in the middle.

All along the road she kept glancing up at my uncle with looks of admiration, amid smiles of mutual affection. It was eight in the morning when we reached the town, and we found the fair in full swing. As we progressed slowly through the milling crowd, Louis leaned down to shake hands with many friends. Everyone recognized him as though he were a white wolf, since he had been born at Laufleur and had accompanied his father from an early age to all the fairs, marriages, and burials of the countryside.

"A very good day to you, Monsieur de Sizy," one of the townsfolk cried out. It was Vignard, the innkeeper, with a jovial face and a reputation, as an expert horse-trader, for polishing up the teeth of old nags.

"Hello, Monsieur Vignard, how are you? I will be along to

your place for lunch with my two young ladies. Reserve three seats for us at noon sharp."

"It's understood, it's understood, Monsieur de Sizy; we will clink our glasses together. A little wine whets friendship, eh, what?" said the old man, with his hat in his hand.

"Thank you, Monsieur Vignard."

"It is always a great honour for me, Monsieur de Sizy, to have the pleasure of killing the worm with you."

We left Uncle Louis, who had matters to discuss with his notary. Françoise with a list of shopping went to the grocery and to the market, where to my great wonder she succeeded in beating down the prices of the tight-fisted peasant women, no matter how determined they were to sell high. In the meantime I bought some honey for the brown bread of Miss Hayes. While Françoise was carrying her purchases back to the carriage, I went to join my uncle at the Plat d'Étain, where we were to meet at noon. As I was early, I sat down at the corner table reserved for us by Monsieur Vignard at the far end of the room.

Through the open window came the buzzing sound of voices from the fair, the cackle of hens, and the prancing of horses' hoofs as they were led into the courtyard of the hotel. Suddenly I experienced a great shock. Before me, leaning across the table, I saw the long, sinister face of Monsieur de Loches, and in a low voice he murmured, "Why don't you go riding any more in the wood of Le Petit Portail?"

His wife appeared just then looking much fatter than the year before. She greeted me without fervour, and immediately told her husband to move to another empty table. "We must hurry our lunch, I have masses of shopping still to do," she explained.

"You are always starving with hunger," he exclaimed angrily as he rose to join her with obvious regret. "Being so fat, Lord knows how much you need to do some fasting," he fumed.

The presence of Monsieur de Loches upset me so much that I did not know quite what to do. In my ears his question kept ringing, while I looked into space trying to avoid his table where, pretending to be eating hors d'œuvres, he kept looking at me fixedly.

He has a nerve, I repeated to myself, bewildered.

My uncle and Françoise arrived together. They had run into

each other in the main street, where he bought her a handbag to go with her blue dress. Entering the room, she cried, "See what Louis has just given me!"

I could not, however, help looking at Monsieur de Loches, and this time when he met my eyes his face turned to a brick-red colour. Françoise saw him at the same moment, and became silent.

"You need not shout it to the housetops, they will say I am your lover," protested Uncle Louis, and turning he encountered the unsympathetic stare of the Loches couple.

We left Segré much too late. Françoise had delayed us. Stating that she must make some changes in her purchases, she disappeared into the Church of St. John the Baptist where in some strange manner she happened to meet Gabriel de Loches. The wretch made a fearful scene and having snatched the new handbag from her, carried it off. In tears she hastened back to inform me of the incident.

"If I were you, I would not see that dirty cad again," I advised.

"It is not so easy as that, he loves me so terribly," she replied without hesitation.

I was inclined to tell her of my own experience, but suddenly I seemed to hear the voice of maman saying, "Confidences are always a source of trouble." Changing the subject, I suggested that we should go and find Uncle Louis, who was busy giving advice to an old farmer regarding the purchase of a cow.

For an hour the cabriolet had been rolling along the great road. Louis had lighted the lamps, but in the dusk their flame scarcely revealed the puddles in the grey macadam. His conversation had been devoted entirely to the proposition that lawyers are dangerous persons. In a very bad temper he claimed that *le bon Dieu*, having decided to punish men for their wickedness, sent the legal profession to this earth to plague humanity. My uncle explained that his own lawyer, Maître Puygros, would bow before him with the greatest deference while at the same time trying to entangle him in a spider's web of trouble.

"To the devil with that sinister fellow!" my uncle went on; and he was in such a fury that he even forgot blonde Françoise, sitting there close beside him, with so many problems passing

confusedly through her pretty head. "It is all my own fault," Louis continued to complain. "I am infected with the disease of wanting to go to law for a ram with a broken horn or a neighbour's hen in my garden. There is no doubt that the Jews ruin themselves in religious celebrations, the Mohammedans in marriages, and the Christians in lawsuits."

My new horse, Mister Lucas, turned out quite differently from what I had expected. He was as gentle as a lamb. While riding along I explained to him, "You see, Mister Lucas, it is impossible for us to leave the pastures of Laufleur because of a womanizer. Just think, he makes attacks even on girls of my age. I should perhaps mention it to the men of my family, but father, with his love of duelling, would cause a nice scandal. That is why I must be patient, my poor Mister Lucas, and why you have to go circling round with me, like a squirrel in a cage."

Speak of Satan and you'll see his tail, I said to myself one morning, when following my custom, I was riding in the meadows and observed Monsieur de Loches in the distance.

After a moment of indecision he turned his horse in my direction.

"Good morning, mademoiselle. Do you know where I can find Françoise? She said she would meet me here."

"No, monsieur, I have no idea where she is. I have been riding here with Mister Lucas for an hour."

"Why don't you ever leave this meadow?"

"My uncle says that the forest has a bad reputation," I replied, looking at him belligerently.

"Really?" he said with an anxious look. Then raising his hat he left without looking back.

Later on, in a laughing way, I told Françoise about the episode. "Your friend, Monsieur de Loches, was squealing like a pig for you today. He said he was expecting to see you."

"That is funny—we had made no arrangement to meet!" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"Perhaps he misunderstood, the dear man."

"You don't like him much. Tell me, Biquette, are you by any chance jealous?" she asked suspiciously.

At about that time Uncle Louis received a letter from papa, stating that he was arriving shortly in his car, and also mention-

ing that Uncle Ballou had recently been left flat by the "Northern lady". He went on to say that in his opinion it was for the best, but that it would make the poor devil more melancholy than ever.

When he got father's news Louis sent a telegram at once to the deserted one. Five days later both of them arrived at the château, worn out, mopping their brows, and with their starched collars in a pitiable condition after the long trip. Rigobert, our ex-coachman, had driven them in papa's magnificent Renault coupé at the fast clip of nearly forty miles an hour; but the motor kept overheating on all the hills, and three punctures, one after the other, forced them to stop for hours on the roadside under a deadly sun. Having heard their tale, Uncle Louis decided to keep his horses; the automobile in his opinion would never prove a practical invention.

In spite of this, a few days later it was demonstrated that the car could bring some amelioration to life in the country. Distant villages suddenly became accessible for the three would-be young men. They were able to accept invitations to places as far as twenty-five miles away. It was a tremendous distance for people to go who had only just emerged from the days of horses and carriages. The car, of course, had some disadvantages. Its narrow tyres ploughed fearful ruts in the driveways of every château where it passed. No doubt the owners of those houses remarked among themselves:

A little water spoils the wine,
A man grows thin who does not dine,
Our drives no longer are so fine
Since cars came into fashion.

Louis, unconvinced, pointed out that such vehicles were unable to cross the wooden bridges of the countryside, and killed innumerable chickens, which in those days were always trying to get to the other side of the road a little too late.

My father had arranged to send his two horses ahead a few days before. He had scarcely reached the house when he pulled on a sweater and was off on one of them at full gallop. His terror of recovering some of the pounds he had lost at Marien-

bad urged him to the most violent exercise. Ballou, still nursing his troubles, followed him without enthusiasm. His amorous sorrows had in fact reduced him almost to a skeleton.

Being assured that they were in the neighbourhood, I ventured beyond the private meadows of the estate. But something told me that since our last meeting I had no longer anything to fear from Monsieur de Loches.

The same week that father arrived, I had my fourteenth birthday. To celebrate the event, Uncle Louis gave a luncheon party for young people. He asked the two daughters of his hunting neighbour, Bonnal, whose wife permitted them to accept after considerable hesitation. "I don't like my daughters to be hanging around in every château of the district," she remarked stuffily.

Françoise came, of course, accompanied by the same little viscount I had found to be such an unsatisfactory dinner-partner the year before. With them they brought also a young American girl who was staying with her aunt—the owner of the fourth château in that vicinity on which with the other three the village of Mazières depended for its prosperity.

I had chosen the menu with great care, but they had some surprises in store for me. There was the traditional birthday cake with fourteen candles, naturally, and then Miss Hayes had secretly prepared a huge treacle tart. She had not forgotten my passion for the dish, especially when covered with great mounds of whipped cream. Finally I was presented with numerous bouquets of flowers from La Touche, from my guests, and from the servants. They were all decorated with pink satin ribbons.

While I was pouring the coffee, my uncles and papa crept quietly from the library and returned each one with a present. Papa offered me my first bottle of scent: *Cœur de Jeannette* of Houbigant. Louis gave me my first handbag in blue taffeta, embroidered with rosebuds.

"It will go with your winter dresses, Biquette," he explained.

Uncle Ballou brought me a pretty frame from Brussels in chased silver. I was overcome with such sumptuous gifts.

From the style of the presents, it was clear they were beginning to take me seriously. I was growing up. As for the Bonnal sisters, they were dazzled. Before leaving they made a prolonged

inspection of my cupboards from which they emerged with grave and astonished expressions. They were convinced that I was the most spoiled young girl imaginable.

When they were gone, the American exclaimed, looking at her shoes so as not to burst out laughing, "What fools!"

The others who remained behind asked why.

"Because they consider Simone a spoiled child. I can tell you *that* is simply stupid. Life in France for young girls is awful. They are not allowed to do anything. Everything is forbidden or frowned on. None of them can play a good game of tennis, or know how to swim. In London, where I spent the winter with mother, it is very different. I was free to go out alone, I could talk to the same young man whenever I wanted, I went to parties or dances with my friends. I am only seventeen, but I did not have to live like a nun all the time."

We all sat down to listen to her theories. Françoise was so fascinated, she could not take her eyes off her. "Really, what a lovely life!" she sighed.

"I pity you," went on the young revolutionary. "I realize now what a tedious existence you all lead. My Aunt Lamazellière, for instance, is always after me to find out where I am going, what I am thinking, and whether I blow my nose at the right time and in the right way. She even insists that I wear a long nightdress while taking a bath, as if I could soap myself properly covered up that way! I hate it, and I hate it over here." She stopped to wipe away a large tear.

We did not know what to say, since such arrangements seemed quite natural to us, being used to them.

She went on: "Just think, to cap everything, yesterday my uncle was furious because I walked to the village by myself. 'If you continue like this,' the old idiot shouted, 'I will not dare take you to the château in the neighbourhood.'"

After she had left, I asked why French girls were not brought up like Americans.

"Every country has its own customs. In Rome do as the Romans do," Miss Hayes remarked, without making further comment.

Three times a week I went riding at La Touche. Dismounting at the stables I would go quietly to grandfather's study, as I

knew he was there each morning discussing matters with his gardener, Frédéric.

"Ah, there you are, my little girl! Come and kiss your old ancestor. What is your news?"

"I have just come to see you, and to give Mister Lucas a rest, he is sweating hard."

"Have you been to call on your grandmother?"

"I don't know if I will have time."

"Little darling, you will always have time, if you make time."

My grandparents came to lunch at Laufleur only occasionally, and the old lady rarely left the table on those days without making some critical remarks about me. The chief complaint was on the subject of the clothes I was wearing during the dog days of that summer.

"You men have amazing ideas to let the little girl run about almost naked with only a pair of drawers beneath her linen dress. Those are the customs of ancient Babylon."

Uncle Louis and papa made no reply, and instead were content scarcely to kiss her fingertips as she left. The gesture sufficed to say: *this* is all we can manage when our hearts are cold.

The Ruffets by way of economy had few guests during the summer. Papa visited them nearly every day, and was often accompanied by Louis, who was decidedly in love with Françoise. At such times Uncle Ballou went for long walks with the dogs. Biting his pipe-stem he appeared unhappy and contemplative.

"We must do something to rouse the poor fellow from his gloom," Uncle Louis suggested.

"He is one of those zealous, sentimental types," Nicole laughed. "He might have a little flirtation with my sister, Hortense, when she gets here. It would be good for both of them."

I remembered the remark, when I met a short time later at Madame du Ruffet's a giantess. She was Hortense, and she was followed by a tiny husband, Boniface, many years older than herself. They were a provincial couple all right—to their fingertips—and answered to the magnificent name: de la Houblonnière de la Bufferie du Guesclin.

"A name like that should be put outside with the cat," father commented.

They had visited Paris together only once in their lives, since they did not dare leave their Poitevin properties and their numerous children unattended. They were extremely pious and very different from our set, though not at all middle-class in spite of their attitude. On the contrary, they were both aristocratic in fact.

When they came to lunch, the word went round, "Remember your manners, still more manners, always manners."

Our conversation was devoted entirely to the famous pilgrim town of Lourdes, where Monsieur de la Houblonnière, who was a stretcher-bearer of the Holy Virgin, went in June every year, travelling by train in a third-class compartment.

Nicole while the good man was talking about religion and miracles, sat there apparently listening, but with a very vague expression. For the occasion of this visit there was not a trace of powder on her face, her nose was shiny, she never cast a glance at papa.

When we got up from the table, Françoise whispered to me, "What a pair of bores!"

Watching them drive away in the victoria of Ingouville, I burrowed in my head trying to understand how Nicole and that huge mountain of virtue could be sisters. The men of our household discussed it later at great length. Louis claimed that the whole family was like Hortense.

"She is terribly ugly, that Madame de la Houblonnière," said father firmly. "She does her hair well and is kind to her mother, I suppose. Nicole is a pretty duckling hatched by a hen, it seems to me."

About this time an invitation was received from the Countess de Romain. She wished Uncle Louis and his guests to come for luncheon. It was an honour, since the "Beautiful Isor" was famous for entertaining only celebrated and interesting people.

On that day, dressed very elegantly, the three of them drove off in the Renault. Up to the last moment Uncle Ballou refused to join them, but he finally allowed himself to be persuaded. After all, one could hardly pretend to be ill when invited to the château of Fontaine-le-Vieux.

While Miss Hayes was dozing in an arm-chair, Françoise appeared. Her mother had gone to bed in a fury of annoyance

that she had not been asked to the luncheon. Françoise suggested that we take a stroll around the fruit garden.

"In such a heat?"

"Yes, come, we can talk in peace," she urged. On the way she confided to me that Gabriel de Loches did not like me at all.

"Really? What has he against my adorable self?"

"He says you are like your mother, hard and egoistic."

"What right has he to speak of my mother?" I said indignantly. "He is a filthy individual. If I told you, Françoise, what I have heard about him, it would calm you down, you little idiot."

"What do you know?"

But it was too long a story and I did not want to go into it. "Just ask him," I said acidly, "why people call him 'the satyr' when I was living in Ile de France, and why he used to beat his first wife."

"Satyr," said Françoise reflectively, "satyr?"

Father and my uncles returned late that night, as they had been asked to stay for dinner. The next day they were discussing the party. Uncle Ballou seemed completely cheered up, and was talking about Isor animatedly, while the other two winked at each other grinning with delight.

Nicole had arrived early for tea that day and, though still rather put out, wanted to know all the details of the luncheon. "How many people were there?" she asked.

"I should guess about thirty," said Uncle Louis.

"There were some German princes staying at the house to whom Isor is related. There were no flowers at all," Ballou added.

"Why not?"

"Well, it seems that the prince refuses to eat a meal without being able to see the face of his beloved wife—a great fat Saxon lady—and he feared the flowers might hide her from view. They sat opposite each other at table, of course, and he kept blowing kisses to her and calling her 'sweet darling', to which she replied, 'my darling sweet', returning his kisses at the same time with ecstatic smiles."

"They must be a unique couple," remarked Nicole.

"No," said papa, who was acquainted with other German

royalty, because of his trips to Marienbad. "All the Hohenzollerns have the specialty of being excellent husbands and faithful to their wives, like good middle-class people."

"It is obvious that none of us are Hohenzollerns," laughed Louis, glancing at Nicole.

On Madame du Ruffet's arrival she made some excuses for her daughter who, it seemed, had a headache. In spite of the excessive heat I got permission to go and see her after tea, on condition that I wear my large straw hat. I left accordingly on Mister Lucas, who was in a state of distress all along the way because of the horseflies that were biting so hard as to draw blood, and were no doubt, announcing a change of weather by their activity.

I found Françoise, stretched on the carpet in the drawing-room, reading a love story called *Les Pas sur la Neige*. She jumped up in a fright, "Biquette! I thought it was her ladyship."

"Don't worry, she has gone to Langeais in the car with my *paternel*. Why did you not come to tea?"

She had awakened that morning in a temper, it seemed, having had a talk with Gabriel the day before. "I told him that he was called 'the satyr', and that they said he beat his first wife."

"He must have been wild!"

"It was the little Entremont who told you those tales," he replied.

"Yes and no, but why do they call you 'satyr'?"

"Perhaps because I like young girls too much. It is a lot of fuss about nothing at all, in any case. You know, my pretty one, they say the man who does not beat his wife will beat his own breast," he concluded.

I started back too late in view of the threatening storm, meditating on Françoise and Uncle Ballou, both of them with love affairs that brought them so many tears. To add to my worries, Mister Lucas became terrified by the thunder and a drenching rain. With a lot of trouble and in some alarm I managed to gallop to the farm of the Lancelots on grandfather's estate.

"*Mon Dieu*, our demoiselle, you look drowned," cried the old farmer's wife when she saw me.

In front of the hearth I dried myself while her son went to put Mister Lucas under shelter. Miss Hayes and the old boys

must be running riot, I thought. I hope the storm will be over soon. Already I could see a rainbow shining through the down-pour beneath the retreating clouds.

"It is the Devil who is whipping his wife and marrying off his daughter," said the old woman, and she then began insisting that I should have something to drink. "Look, I will get some hot wine, Mademoiselle Simone, it will do you good."

"It is very nice of you, but I don't want to trouble you, Mère Lancelot."

"Heavens, no, it's not any trouble, our demoiselle."

As soon as the rain had stopped and the thunder had moved on, I mounted quickly, and thanking them for their kind hospitality, I started off. In the yard I met the daughter of the household. In her piercing voice she was hooting to the cows to return from the pastures. At this Mister Lucas shied. The little glass of wine under my belt giving me courage and a feeling of dominance, I made use of my crop, deciding that I would teach my horse not to be nervous, and would also give Françoise some advice straight from the shoulder.

At the house the dinner was getting cold, the whole family was searching along the roads for me. There were tears and shouts of joy when they discovered I was still alive.

From time to time I was required to appear at La Touche for lunch, but I never stayed long because of the stuffy atmosphere of the place, so different from Laufleur. At my uncle's I really felt at ease. In one respect the place was most unusual—even the kitchen was not forbidden me. Mère Jacquelin, the cook, was a peasant woman of the neighbourhood who had reigned there for many years. She loaded me with sweets, and little curtsies that made her Tourangeau bonnet bob up and down on her head.

"What are you contriving there, Mère Jacquelin?"

"A duck pâté, our demoiselle."

Uncle Louis was fond of his food; he insisted on tasty gravies and subtle sauces. I lingered often in the kitchen delighted with the smell of fresh-baked bread, of cream, and cheese. The soft glow of a lamp lighted the yellow walls and was reflected from the copper pans. In the corner by the chimney faggots of wood were drying to kindle the fire next day. Through the porthole

of the painted kitchen timepiece I could see the pendulum swinging, tick . . . tock. The old brass candlesticks on a shelf were only additional items, among so many others, which seemed not far removed from possessing souls, so long had they been in the service of my uncle's family and so faithfully had they performed their functions.

This corner of the house represented the true country of Touraine. I wandered there, around the white wood tables that were scoured so incessantly they positively glistened like satin. Something was always arriving on those tables: hot cakes and breads, cream custards, fried eggplants, roast partridges—my nostrils were tortured, and many a time I burned my fingers snatching a tempting morsel. Miss Hayes complained that I lived in the kitchen. She pointed out that I had never been granted such licence and that I should not take advantage of a bachelor's innocence in the circumstances. But Uncle Louis had no objections, provided I did not disturb Mère Jacquelin in her obtruse confections. He even added, "It is splendid for her to find out how to make pastry. Perhaps one day it will enable her to keep a husband's love. Good food makes good husbands, you know."

"Speak for yourself—you are thin as a rail," father said seriously. "As for me, I only dream of eating boiled food."

"Yes, but anyway you are greedy as a cat. Mère Jacquelin knows it all right, and is putting out her finest efforts on your behalf."

"Your cook is assassinating me; I have taken on six kilos since I have been here. The less one eats the better one feels," father sighed; but in spite of every effort he did not practise that excellent maxim.

Mère Jacquelin had only one pet aversion: it was the tramps. At every hour they were knocking at the door of the kitchen asking for food. She simply could not understand why Uncle Louis was always delighted to give them a small sum of money, two fresh eggs, and a piece of bread. He even permitted them to sleep in one of his sheds.

"They are a tribe of louse-infested empty stomachs, and our gentleman never stops bestowing on them undeserved alms." It was thus she described—as though her own life-blood was being

drawn from her—the charity my uncle saw fit to offer to the poor.

No more than she did I like the beggars I was always meeting on my rides. When I saw them from a long way off, I would touch my horse with both spurs, and start off at full speed in the opposite direction. These poor men walked along in a weary manner, their small belongings hanging in a bundle over their shoulders on the end of a stick. At their heels generally followed a half-starved dog. They were enigmatic creatures, these tramps, these travellers by moonlight. Dangerous and hardly earthly they seemed to me from my sheltered position in society.

Uncle Louis maintained, however, that they were simply unfortunates who had been unable to conform in this age of industrialism to the dictates of progress. In his opinion they were not to be feared. They were devotees of liberty, he explained to me, when I told of my encounters with them.

In spite of his assurances I advised the servants to be sure to lock and bar all the doors of the château, because papa for his part—less convinced of their virtue—held that they might commit murder for the sake of a gold watch or just to pass the time.

I cannot know whom to believe, I thought, in this family of jokers with different ideas; and scratching my head I decided to take no chances.

“Biquette” had become the name by which I was called. Gérard de Pont-Leroy had started it, Françoise also used it, and finally my family had apparently adopted it. Old Séraphin, my uncle’s butler for so many years, also called me “Mademoiselle Biquette”. It enchanted him, I suppose, to relax in this way from his otherwise perfect deportment. Nothing amused me so much as this old serving man who waited on my uncle and his guests with the meticulous and anxious devotion of a Spanish duenna. If a door admitted the slightest draught, he closed it, warning that “Monsieur le Comte d’Entremont will surely catch his death of pneumonia”. He was always vigorously lecturing the servant girls, and kept assuring papa or my uncle, with an air of superior knowledge, that a man of straw is worth a woman of gold.

If any wine remained in a decanter, he drank it without

making a mystery of the matter. "It would be a sin to let it turn sour, and furthermore water teaches you how to weep, but wine how to sing," he would explain by way of excuse. "In my youth the gentry used to have their forelocks curled, in the style of Louis Philippe. I was an expert at that business. It is a pity our gentlemen have given up the fashion," he repeated to me over and over again. There was no doubt that he knew the life of everyone in the vicinity down to the smallest details. He was not of course, the type of man who listened at keyholes; and one could be certain also that he did not discuss his knowledge with others. He had too much dignity and respect for his masters to descend to that.

In those days the servants were allowed a Sunday afternoon off, every two weeks. They dressed in their civilian clothes after lunch, and went for a walk in the fresh air, coming back satisfied at six o'clock to resume their duties. Séraphin considered this a waste of time. He went out only once a year, on the day of the Assumption, out of respect for the Holy Virgin, to whom he had been dedicated before he was born. It was, moreover, his favourite festival. On that occasion nothing could have prevented him from putting on the grey alpaca suit he kept hanging carefully pressed in his cupboard from year to year with a view to this unique event. "I am going to make my devotions, Mademoiselle Biquette," he said, taking off his hat with a low bow, on one of those days. Spick-and-span as a new penny, he walked briskly off to the village. In his hand he bore a bouquet of white roses for the altar of the Virgin. No doubt he was thinking with delight how after the service he would go to play a game of *manille* and drink a glass of absinthe with the priest. Probably he was saying to himself: Either one goes on a spree or one does not, Séraphin, my boy.

The priest of Mazières, a fine character from the countryside, hit it off splendidly with his parishioners. For his sermons on Sunday he discussed the sowing of seed and the harvesting of the crop, or the picking and crushing of the grapes. All these events were blessed, he explained, by the hand of God.

In my family no one ever missed the Sunday Mass. The servants were driven to church in the brake, while we went huddled together in the cart or the victoria. The little church of

the village served the four châteaux in the neighbourhood. After the ceremony the châtelains gathered together in the parvis outside where they discussed the news, and issued invitations to one another for the following days of the week.

It was there that Grandmother Montigny asked father on one such occasion to come to dinner. As soon as he had arrived in Touraine, papa, accompanied by Ballou—to give him courage—had gone to call on her. This invitation to the three men was her response.

Quips and jokes were the order among them when they had managed at last to get through the evening. "The dullards have taken La Touche this year for their bastion," remarked Ballou.

"Poor Father Montigny, what a pill it must be for him to swallow, to have those pedants in his house during two months in the year," said papa making a long face of commiseration.

Among his neighbours there were some whom Uncle Louis detested to the point of exasperation. I heard more about them in a curious way. One evening Miss Hayes had retired early to bed with a headache. It was my opportunity to join the three men in the library, and I crept in on tiptoe, for fear of being sent upstairs much too soon to suit me. I discovered papa and my uncles in comfortable leather armchairs drawn up before the fire. Their backs were to the door and they failed to notice my entrance. In a distant corner of the room I found a jigsaw puzzle and promptly sat down on the floor, pretending to put it together.

Uncle Louis, blowing a cloud of smoke from his cigar, was saying, "It is landowners like him who have caused our peasants to hang us high on a short rope throughout the ages."

I realized at once that Uncle Louis had started a topic he could declaim for hours. Whenever such persons were mentioned he became furious. The truth was that a few had a bad reputation, and there was no doubt that they did much to cause ill will against the nobility and gentry; even if most of those socially prominent had in the last sixty years very generally come down off their high horses.

Speaking of the same person, I suppose, papa, feeling just as disapproving as Uncle Louis commented, "Yes, Baron de Beaugrenard shows in every respect that he is a complete imbecile.

By the way, Louis, this brandy is really excellent. Is it the '47 or the '68?"

"It's the '47, old man, but I think the '68 is really more interesting—the '47 is beginning to lose its bouquet, I fear. As I was saying, the fact is no one on his property, or in the vicinity, has failed to bear grievances against him. It is a particular amusement for that brute to gallop at full speed across the sprouting wheatfields of the farmers or permit his hounds to destroy the sheep of some frightened shepherd. If a peasant happens to walk too close to his horse when the hunting has proved poor, the unfortunate person runs the risk of receiving a blow with a crop, to alleviate Beaugrenard's bad humour. Presumably he gets great satisfaction at knowing that someone else is smarting, and it pleases him to take revenge in this way on one of the *cults-terreux*. He despises them, of course, and the poor men can do nothing to protect themselves."

Uncle Ballou was having trouble with his pipe, as usual, but I could see the back of his neck was getting scarlet with fury at Louis' recital. Tapping the bowl on a bronze firedog in a vicious manner, he let loose with several expressions that contained words entirely unknown to me.

Zut! I thought, perhaps that it what is called swearing.

Uncle Louis waited impatiently while Ballou was relieving his feelings, and then went on, "If a poacher is caught on his lands, the affair is handled with dispatch, I can assure you. The man goes to prison for at least two years and gets a fine heavy enough to ruin him and his for the next three generations. As you know, Beaugrenard lives in tremendous style with his family in that fine feudal castle, which was spoiled completely, in my opinion, by the awful restorations of that architect—what's his name? Oh, yes, Viollet-le-Duc."

"Excuse my interrupting, said Ballou. Would you mind passing the brandy? Evidently this man is an unutterable cad; but tell us, what goes on in the castle? How does the *salaud* live? Has he really got money?"

"Yes, that's the worst of it, he is exceedingly rich and entertains numerous guests from morning to night and from night to morning. They eat and drink, sing and dance. It's a real orgy. In particular they play hide-and-seek, and I am told they dis-

appear in couples for hours at a time, hiding—for a reason not difficult to imagine—in the haylofts of the dungeon tower.”

“What annoys me most,” said papa, “is the way they go to Mass on Sunday with so much ostentation. They give an outward appearance of devotion, while living solely for their passions and worldly pleasures.”

“As for his wife,” Louis resumed, “she is a huge Juno type. For years she used to appear in the village and everywhere with an old bachelor, a farmer, who is quite wealthy and has property near Laufleur. They lived openly together and made no bones about it until one day she caught her lover in bed with a pretty peasant girl. In a rage she fired a shotgun at him, and somehow missed with every pellet.”

“Even I could have done better at that range,” said papa, who was under no illusion that his skill with a duelling pistol extended also to his marksmanship in game shooting.

“But wait,” Uncle Louis perorated, “I have not yet given you the final and crowning proof that Beaugrenard is no gentleman. You must believe me when I say that the pig gets drunk. Yes, even in the presence of ladies! Can you imagine any man with pretensions to being well-bred displaying such appalling manners?”

Just then papa began to make those little preparatory squirmings in his chair that indicated he was about to get up. Recognizing the signal, I fled noiselessly from the room and got to bed with nobody the wiser for my escapade.

My father enjoyed teasing people in a jolly and not unkind way. For the hundredth time he addressed Uncle Louis, “Well, when are you going to have your party, with Burgundy for the princes, champagne for the duchesses, and claret for your real friends?”

“Maxence, I beg you, please vary your jokes,” he replied, stopping his ears.

The party in question was to be a luncheon, followed by a tea, which my uncle was giving in honour of the Romans.

A few days before it took place, Uncle Ballou had to leave hurriedly on receipt of a telegram from Saint-Valery informing him that his mother was seriously ill and wished him to come.

"My poor maman is old. I fear it will be the end for her," he remarked as he strapped up his baggage.

On the steps of the perron, after they had said good-bye to him, Uncle Louis asked whether Madame Ballou would leave any property. Father took on a doubtful expression.

"There will not be much, I fear, when the pear has been sliced three ways and the estate duties paid. In any case no capital can survive in Ballou's hands—he is a dreamer."

The day before the party in honour of the Fontaine-le-Vieux neighbours, my uncle summoned all the servants to the salon. Hunched up in an armchair with his pipe between his teeth, he delivered a speech that was interrupted by questions.

"I am counting on you to make the thing pass off without blunders," he said firmly.

Séraphin and the cook had refused flatly my uncle's offer to get some extra men from a caterer in Tours. They said they could manage all right. Madame du Ruffet sent her valet: then there was Rigobert, and with the stable boys to help, it was felt that the affair could be carried off successfully.

My uncle took an interest in the smallest details. His questions flowed in an endless stream. Has Mademoiselle Susette, the village seamstress, finished fitting the liveries? Was Mère Jacquelin satisfied with her truffle pâtés? How was her hare *à la Royale*? Had the gamekeeper brought the crayfish? Séraphin must not forget the bouquet of flowers he was to give to Madame la Comtesse de Romain when she was leaving the house. "Séraphin, you must make no mistakes," he insisted, quite out of breath after giving so many orders.

"Our monsieur must not worry, everything will be for the best," the old butler assured him.

"In the best of all possible worlds," father added, to conclude the quotation. He was greatly amused by the anxiety of his host. "You really need a wife, my poor Louis. I can see how helpless you are when it comes to entertaining."

"Be quiet, you sinister fool!" uncle cried, thrusting himself back into his fauteuil.

From early dawn the servants were hustling about the stove. Mère Jacquelin was giving orders to the maids who had arrived from the neighbouring farms. At eleven o'clock the last button

had been sewn on to the last livery of the improvised footmen.

My hair had been braided the night before and was now subjected to the curling-irons by Miss Hayes. After working on me for three-quarters of an hour, she cocked her head on one side and looked at the effect critically; then she gave me a satisfied kiss, bubbling with pride at her achievement. I noticed that her white Shantung dress gave off an unpleasant odour, but it did not surprise me, as that material always did in those days. My own dress was of an indeterminate mauve tone, of a shade so peculiar that it was uncertain whether it was pink or lilac. On my wrist was a little gold bracelet, and I was wearing shoes with heels that were definitely not low. In fact I decided that I was making a distinct upward step in life. I was charmed with my ensemble.

When I was at last ready, I went to see my father in his room. He asked me to turn round so as to see me from every angle. "Not bad," he said with a grunt, "but your nose is shining. Let us put a little powder on. For Heaven's sake, don't tell anyone. They would think me mad."

At quarter-past twelve the "Beautiful Isor" alighted from her car, accompanied by her husband, Humbert, who looked exactly like a wooden soldier—without a neck. With them was a mass of people, all of them somewhat crumpled from a trip during which they had been squeezed together like sardines. They were followed shortly by an open car, also from Fontaine-le-Vieux, containing another horde of guests. In spite of their light coats, motoring goggles, and heavy veils, their first care was to shake the dust off their clothes, straighten their hats, and arrange their hair disturbed by the rigours of the journey.

From my window, hiding behind the pots of mignonette, I watched this invasion of strangers. I was impressed with the names and the titles of these important persons, as each one was presented on the perron below.

"Monsieur de Devize . . . la Princesse Lornaska; Comte d'Entremont . . . le Duc d'Abatie," and so it went on for an hour at least. Papa was not fooling when he stated that Isor was a woman of cream who only knew the cream.

One after another victorias began to arrive, appearing very old-fashioned after the dashing modernity of the automobiles.

The Bonnal girls emerged from a large brake, chattering like starlings, untiringly polite, and correctly chaperoned by their father, their grandmother dressed like an old print, and their mother—a lady as round as a balloon. Monsieur de Bonnal complained bitterly that day how with a mother, a wife, and four daughters he was married to six plagues.

Grandfather and grandmother, in the splendour of their antiquated turnout, followed Madame du Ruffet and Françoise, both of them ravishing in their summer dresses.

My uncle had asked to the lunch: his family, his close friends, and the most distinguished people of the vicinity; the others, belonging to what he called "the second zone", were invited only for the tea to be held later in the day.

In accordance with paternal instructions, I did not appear until fifteen minutes before the meal. It was early enough, however, to require my distributing an incalculable number of curtsies, and to make me feel quite giddy turning round in all directions to greet newcomers at every instant.

At last Séraphin opened wide the double doors of the dining-room, and standing as stiff as a picket fence, announced "Monsieur is served."

The crowd surged toward the food and I was carried along in the flood until I found my place at the end of one of the three long tables set up in the ancient guardroom. Once more I discovered that I was seated next to the little viscount I disliked so much. For this occasion he was dressed in a serge suit; his jacket was short and tight; in the back it was so long, however, that it quite hid his high double collar. Arrayed in this way, he seemed more puny and stunted than ever. He had come with madame his mother, who never left him. In the countryside he was known as "mother's own boy".

Sitting on his other side, Françoise, with her long wavy hair falling almost to her waist and in an adorable pale blue dress, knew very well that she was the object of admiring glances. She was so occupied, however, in listening to the conversation of Madame de Romain that she paid no attention to the viscount at all. My neighbours, the young daughters of a titled member of the Chamber of Deputies, were also curled and primed to the last degree, but they had nothing to say as they sat stiffly

on their chairs rolling bread balls. For my part, though I tortured my imagination, I could not find a single topic to discuss. When at last the two daughters ventured to speak, it was with the exaggerated and slurred accents of a great actress. This was intimidating. I smiled at them in a foolish manner, thinking to myself: I'm a stupid clam.

During the lunch a gentleman near me remarked before everyone, "Maxence, I have a millionaire widow for you."

"Oh, thanks, but I'm not for sale, my money situation is flourishing," said father defensively.

"You are making a mistake; she is also very pretty."

"Whom are you talking about?" father asked, pricking his ears.

"About Madame de Nanteuil, our neighbour."

"Pretty? Do you call her pretty? A woman as soft as an eider-down? You are dreaming, and besides she has had three husbands already. No, thanks, I want to cling to life a little longer, if you don't mind."

"Wait a minute, she did not kill them," said the man indignantly.

"Perhaps not, but she certainly cast an evil eye on them," papa replied ungraciously.

Later on, I asked Françoise if she had heard the conversation and the proposal of Monsieur de Lautry to marry my father off to a female Bluebeard.

"That would be the end, if you had a man-killer in the family," she exclaimed.

When the protracted luncheon was at last concluded, Uncle Louis suggested, as we left the room, "Françoise and Simone, please take the young people into the library."

The daughters of the deputy, having installed themselves in comfortable armchairs felt impelled to comment on the arrangement of the flowers. "It was really beautiful," they exclaimed; "only an artist could have created such wonderful effects."

"Surely," I replied, overcome by a wild desire to laugh when I thought about the old gardener with his clumsy hands. Cursing like a demon he had passed the morning trying to contrive something that would please me but with small success.

So as to kill time we went to look at the thirteenth-century ramparts with their historic associations. The viscount seized the occasion to steal away in the English manner. Looking at his watch he fled toward the drawing-rooms with long strides. I did not blame him, for our little group had run out of conversation, and were staring dumbly at each other like so many dogs in porcelain.

Having completed our inspection of the fortifications, Françoise suggested we should join the family, and everyone was delighted. We got back almost without attracting attention, except for the watchful eye of Uncle Louis.

Wherever has papa gone? I asked myself, wandering sadly through the rooms and feeling rather lost among the guests. To tell the truth it was tiring to be in the midst of such a throng of strangers. Luckily the second zone was arriving for tea. Thank Heavens, we shall soon have finished with this pleasure party, I thought.

While I was looking for father, I discovered Nicole sitting on a sofa holding hands with a chubby little man who seemed very sure of himself. Disconcerted, I stopped for an instant to look at her, thinking that her chocolate-brown eyes had become wonderfully wheedling, and that she was smiling at him and wriggling her body about in a most intriguing manner.

The gentleman with her was evidently thinking: This Nicole is a charming person, so plump, with such lovely dimples, and a peachlike complexion.

Fascinated by this surprising scene I was about to poke my nose forward a little farther so as to see how things like that happened when I felt a nudge at my elbow. Looking round startled, I discovered the cynical face of Monsieur de Sâblon, a man I had never liked in spite of his friendship with papa. He put his finger to his lips and then indicated that I should depart. I wondered how he had got to the party since Uncle Louis detested him, but supposed that he had come with the others from Fontaine-le-Vieux.

"Tell me, Françoise," I rushed to ask her, "with whom is your mother talking?"

"With a duke, stupid."

"Hullo, curlytop, which way are your thoughts curling to-

day?" It was father, suddenly behind me. "You look like a conspirator," he added.

"Papa, I was looking for you everywhere," I exclaimed joyfully.

"See, the second zone is bringing up their reinforcements. Not one is missing," he exclaimed, laughing.

It was true a battalion was pouring in. The Marquise de Valigny, squeezed into a striking velvet creation, appeared in the opening of the great doorway, followed by the Marquis in his general's uniform that was also too tight, and by a straining crease across the back betrayed how close it was to the point of bursting. Madame de Valigny seemed annoyed, probably because she had not been invited for the luncheon.

That was how the general explained it to father, at any rate. "As for me, I don't care a damn. I don't care a damn for anything. It's my wife, you know . . ." His voice faded away as he shrugged his shoulders.

Monsieur de Loches, tall and lean, came twisting his way through the crowd, looking for someone—Françoise, I suppose. He was trailing behind his wife, who seemed more vulgar-looking than ever in a parti-coloured dress.

He is really handsome, I thought; it is a pity he is married and that Françoise loves him so madly. Well, *makhtub*, as the Arabs say.

"How d'ye do, mademoiselle," he remarked to me.

"How d'ye do, monsieur," I replied coldly.

"Permit me to compliment you on your pretty dress."

I was in a hurry to leave and interrupted him sharply, "Don't wear yourself out with phrases; that nonsense about 'rosy apples' no longer works."

Nonplussed, Monsieur de Loches could not help murmuring as he moved on, "Nasty kid, I would like to spank you."

Séraphin in some agitation came up at that moment. "Mademoiselle Simone, have you seen Monsieur de Sizzy?"

"No, he should be on the terrace," I replied, somewhat relieved at his presence.

A few minutes later he hurried by again, almost at the run, followed by my uncle. They disappeared up the stone staircase.

Something strange is happening, I thought, and starting at

once in pursuit discovered them in a conference with Miss Hayes at the door of the watercloset, through which a storm of violent sobs was escaping. On the advice of my uncle, Miss Hayes knocked gently, asking at the same time, "Can I do something to help you, madame?"

After a long delay, the door finally opened and a fat lady emerged, her face streaming with tears. She was one of the guests who had come with the party from Fontaine-le-Vieux. Louis, somewhat embarrassed, was trying to slip away, but the lady cried out with a strong foreign accent, "Monsieur de Sizzy, where did you find this toilet paper? It is the same my poor dead mother used . . . I am still terribly upset about it."

After a little inquiry I discovered that this extremely sensitive lady was a Polish princess.

When everyone had finally departed, papa and Louis agreed that they needed at least two weeks to recover from the ordeal. Worn out with the affair, they had become convinced that nobody would ever go.

"Well, it ran off all right, anyway," Louis remarked.

"As though on wheels," father reassured him.

"Biquette, come here and tell me if Gabriel de Loches is paying much attention to Françoise," Uncle Louis entreated.

"Why, no, of course not, what a funny idea," I replied, my heart beating anxiously.

"All the same, they spent a tremendous time in the greenhouse together. A pretty girl and a tattered gown always get caught up sooner or later," he muttered under his breath, as if talking to himself.

"You know very well, old man, that Biquette has been brought up from infancy never to repeat anything," said father, who did not like the cross-examination.

Miss Hayes was surprised that evening to find I was so nervous. "Parties are bad for you," she complained. "You are writhing about in your bed like an earthworm cut in half. For Heaven's sake go to sleep!"

But I could not find repose. In my head kept revolving the question uncle had asked. I wondered if he had also seen Françoise and Monsieur de Loches with their lips glued together. I had observed them—the idiots—without their knowing it.

After all, Uncle Louis could have observed the affair.

Before she left, Madame de Romain had invited her host and my father to a dinner and a theatrical performance she was giving shortly. In a condescending manner she turned to Madame du Ruffet and tossed a lukewarm invitation that was immediately accepted.

Father did not feel he wanted to go there, he announced a little later. "It is time for me to leave your hospitable roof, Louis; you have had enough of me," he said by way of excuse.

"That is fine of you, to give me that sort of song and dance after all the years of hospitality you have offered me," said my uncle offensively.

"Isor is charming, but she tires me. This is the second time she has fastened on me with her political notions. I cannot accept her revolutionary concepts. All women are fools," said papa, "especially the intelligent ones."

"Why don't you discuss something else?" suggested Louis.

"What are you talking about? When she has an idea in her head it is not in her feet."

"Precisely so," Uncle Louis admitted.

As a woman always wanting to astonish people, Madame de Romain sought to display her theories. She horrified father with his strong conservative leanings that were completely royalist—he subscribed, of course, to *l'Action Française*. "In my judgment," he stated tersely, "her pose will do her fearful harm in good society." It might be true that she had the most envied salon in Paris, but he considered it most disquieting that she was an avowed Socialist, and he could not help experiencing a definite shock when he heard her declare flatly with that fearful assurance she possessed:

"My poor Monsieur d'Entremont, don't slumber like that in your ivory tower. The days and dreams you cling to are gone; whether you like it or not, the hour of the people has arrived and the individual must yield. It is only proper that it should be so, in any case."

"You are mad, my dear," father answered in a rage. "Ever since the world has been the world there has always been a superior class, and you belong to it with all its benefits, though you pretend to deny it."

"Of course, I am not draped in a red flag, but, believe me, every time I go canvassing on behalf of votes for women, I propound concepts that might destroy my privileges."

"How can you truly feel that way and yet continue to give the elaborate fancy-dress balls, for which you are so famous?"

"Well, you must remember Humbert, he adores that kind of amusement." And for once this lady with advanced opinions had to take refuge behind the well-pressed trousers of her husband.

"Such affairs must do you a lot of harm in the eyes of your Socialist friends," father chuckled, recovering at last his good-natured raillery.

"That is so. My creed and my position do not match, you see."

Uncle Louis always supported Isor in these discussions. "If the top of the ladder felt the way you do," he remarked with conviction, "everything would go better. Alas, we are too egocentric. Such an attitude is inexcusable. None of us is willing to open his eyes to the miseries of the world. It is too distressing even to think of them. The children of the fortunate are those who create the unfortunate. All this must change, and soon, or the people will shorten us down again. I would not blame them anyway," he added. No doubt he was thinking about his pet aversion, the Baron de Beaugrenard, whom he had so carefully avoided asking to his famous rout.

Father was not to be disposed of with such altruistic statements, which he simply could not comprehend, defining them in his mind as "highfalutin balderdash". In his considered judgment, society was going along very well—the big were big, the little were little—why upset things? "You know, there is charity," he observed. "There are many rich people who are extremely generous."

As if Uncle Louis did not know *that*, I thought. He never ceases taking care of every beggar in the Canton. The peasants always mumble when they see me pass, "That is the niece of Monsieur de Sizy. He gives to the poor without advertising the fact, and he is not ashamed to clink glasses with us, paying for bottles like a Cræsus." Father on the other hand, while very generous from time to time, did not really understand how to act with poor people. Nobody could have been more polite to

his servants and farm people—he was so polite, in fact, that it always seemed as though he were begging to do them a favour, instead of giving them orders—but he had a sort of nervous timidity that did not warm their hearts.

"I don't know why it is," he explained to me, "I always have the impression they are going to ask me for a loan." If someone begged him for charity on the road, he would search through his pockets and never fail to produce a small coin for such occasions. The gift having been accepted, he would raise his hat and hurry on his way. The incident never went further than that, as he could not endure misery; it shocked him too fearfully. By way of making clear his point of view, he explained to me, "I cannot bear people who live like princes and talk like members of the Salvation Army. Look at Isor," he went on, "she gives endless receptions, or perhaps an expensive theatrical evening; she has a string of titles stretching back to Noah, and yet she is violently radical. Such contrasts don't go well. I like one thing or the other."

In spite of his recriminations he went just the same to Fontaine-le-Vieux that evening, accompanied by Louis, and Nicole, looking particularly beautiful in her best dress. Françoise came to spend the night at Lauffeur with me.

When we were alone before dinner, glancing quickly at the door to see that she was not overheard, she whispered, "Marguerite, our maid, is pregnant."

"What are you saying?" I exclaimed.

"Biquette, after all, you are too young to understand," she said importantly.

"Not at all! Come on, explain yourself!"

"Well, a married man has given her a child."

"Oh!" and I could think of nothing else to say, feeling terribly shocked.

"Today I found her in the linen room in a state of despair. She is talking of suicide," Françoise went on ominously.

"You should tell your mother."

"She would be discharged at once. Are you mad?"

"What *can* you do? But why ever did she have to flirt with a married man?"

"That is life," said Françoise philosophically.

"Life's full of troubles, you mean. If I were you I would not see Gabriel de Loches any more. He is married and perhaps married men only bring bad luck."

"The world presses down and rolls over the poor soft ones; but, instead of talking about it, try and reflect what we must do to get her out of the kneading trough."

"I should like to know how you understand so much about life at your age," I said enviously.

"For a kid you know quite a lot yourself, Biquette, and it has come to you like that, quite easily, without your ever realizing it, I imagine."

At that moment the door of the salon opened, and Miss Hayes poked her head in to suggest, "Children, let's go for a walk, the rain is over and it is a lovely, crystal-clear evening."

"Yes," said Françoise, looking through the window, "after the storm we will have fine weather." And she glanced at me with a look full of hope, no doubt having reference to the poor servant girl and her baby problem.

For my part I was anxiously feeling that Françoise should forget Gabriel; and in this connection I believed Uncle Louis was suspicious, and that the liaison could very well become a tragic drama. In my youthful mind it did not occur to me that there was any possibility of the affair turning into a comedy, much less a farce.

The next day Madame du Ruffet gave us a complete description of the evening at Fontaine-le-Vieux. It started with the representation of a court gala. A great hall, three times larger than the one at Laufleur, was filled with people, graded in the order of their titles one above the other. There was nobody present except those out of the top drawer. They were the nobility of the neighbourhood and also from some distance away. Many gorgeous dresses and exquisite sets of jewellery could be seen, not to speak of a profusion of women remarkable on account of their family, or for their position, or their chic. Duchesses—there were three—took their places on stools set apart for each of them. The marquises, comtesses, and lesser stars were assigned seats according to rank. In the dungeon the buffet was laid out in the most magnificent manner, with two

galleries—through which prisoners once passed—arranged for entrance and exit to this unexampled reversal of things as they used to be. The great hall was decorated, as were most of the rooms, with magnificent tapestries, and all were overrun with lackeys in the uniform of the château. The affair turned out a veritable triumph, as was expected, for the lady of the house. Isor it seemed, had won acclaim not only for her performance as an actress, but also as châtelaine. Everyone agreed that it could not have been put on better at the Comédie Française. The amateur actors admitted with some astonishment that it was an unbelievable success. Four days earlier no one had an idea of when to enter or leave a scene. Many had remarked, in fact, that there had been fearful disputes at the rehearsals either through false pride or laziness.

"In any case they had gone through tremendous exertions so as to entertain those devilish guests," father explained, "and you have to amuse them one way or another. Although bedded, boarded, and laundered, they are never happy."

Because she was particular about etiquette and very formal in any case, the aunt of our young American friend believed she was obliged to ask us for lunch, in return for the one to which we had invited her niece. She apologized for her niece's absence, explaining that a cable from England had recalled her hurriedly to be near her mother, who was ill.

"That's a good one," Françoise snickered; "she is surely out picnicing somewhere on the Thames with a charming blond Englishman, the lucky girl."

Going through father's mail I learned of his intention to leave shortly. Sir Ronald had written him from the Travellers' Club that he was on his way to Biarritz where they were meeting as arranged in mid-September.

"Are you going to Biarritz, papa?" I asked.

"It is delightful to know that you read my correspondence, I hope it amuses you."

"*Zut!* I have blundered . . . Anyway, please don't be angry, you can read mine," I offered cajolingly.

"Thanks, Miss Curious. Yes, I am going to Biarritz, but for mercy's sake don't tell Françoise. I have special reasons."

It was not difficult to discover what the reasons were. No

doubt Madame du Ruffet would also have liked to go to Biarritz, and papa had no intention of taking her along. The letter from the Englishman went on to say:

Join me as soon as possible at the Hôtel du Palais. You will find me there with friends and some ravishing ladies. We will have a lot of fun.

As always with this admirable baronet, the pursuit of pleasure was a sacred rite.

"Don't worry, Nicole, Maxence has left for Saint-Valery to console poor Ballou at the loss of his mother," Uncle Louis reassured her when next they met, though he was quite aware of what was going on. To himself he murmured, "A dog is always satisfied with a bone, and a woman with a lie."

"He might have asked me to join him," Madame du Ruffet said, without trying to hide her disappointment.

"It would have been compromising for you, my dear, and you would have been just as happy as a rat in a trap," Louis consoled her. After the caddish system of men who hang together for fear of being tarred and feathered separately, he rejoiced to think that father was peacefully travelling to that silver shore so full of enchanting promises, freed at last from a woman the dear fellow doubtless considered too exacting.

Miss Hayes summoned me from the stone staircase where I was reading my mail—a long letter from Gérard. He wrote:

There has been a real catastrophe, my darling Biquette. Everyone here says that I am thinking too much about you, ever since my sister, that pest, showed your photo to mother. Monsieur the priest, on her request, has been explaining to me the love of God and the dangers of women. In horror the sainted man rolled his eyes like billiard balls. He advised me to forget you at once. Just think how likely that would be! Could you forget me, my pretty Biquette?

To tell the truth I had not thought much about Gérard lately, and suddenly I began to reproach myself for my lack of romantic appreciation. Perhaps they were right when they said that with me it was "out of sight, out of mind".

"Do you know that your grandparents' forest is on fire?" my governess cried out when she found me at last, after I had finished my letter.

"What are you telling me? What a fearful thing! Order them to harness the horse, and we'll go to see what is happening," I screamed.

"Your uncle has already left to try and put it out."

"How did it start?"

"They say it was a servant your grandmother discharged. He lit it from revenge."

"It is the beginning of the end. Papa has always said that one of these days grandmother would be assassinated if she kept on driving her servants away in that heartless manner."

We galloped to the fire and found the men beating with branches cut from the trees a conflagration that licked onward all the while insatiably. Grandfather with his game leg was performing prodigies, while Uncle Louis, his face blackened by smoke, was practically exhausted. In spite of these handicaps the two of them urged on the fire-fighters without a pause. Luckily, as it turned out, the wind shifted and in a short time the danger to the main forest was averted. With my usual desire to see what was happening, I pressed forward, our pony became panic-stricken, and it was only through Miss Hayes that we succeeded in escaping from being roasted.

In the midst of these alarming adventures Françoise appeared. To her the circumstances of our meeting seemed of no moment. She told me that Uncle Louis had asked her for dinner the next evening.

"I have not seen you for days—where have you been?" I asked.

"My thoughts have been melancholy, Biquette; the affair of Marguerite the maid worries me a lot, but I am going to try something," she added mysteriously.

It transpired the next day that no material damage had been caused to the forest. Uncle Louis announced that if he must have a fire he hoped it would always be like that. The house returned to its normal routine as though nothing had taken place.

Françoise arrived for dinner, and when it was over whispered in my ear, "Skip out of here, I have something to say to Louis."

It was a clear night, without a moon—one of those damp

nights, full of vapours that creep up from the soil in seductive waves of fragrance. The sent of petunias lay heavy in the air, assaulting my nostrils with an exotic perfume. Sitting outside on the balustrade of the perron a restless desire came upon me to throw myself into the midst of those bewitching flower beds so as to bathe my senses still more deeply in their very essence.

A voice caused me to turn my head. Françoise was speaking to Louis, asking him something in so low a tone that I could not catch the purport of her coaxing murmur. I stole closer to listen.

"Please, say yes, you could save the poor girl." Through the glass doors I could see her slide from the chair on which she was sitting, and rest her head on his knees. She was begging, her eyes filled with tears.

When with a brusque and almost violent movement he sought to get up, she forced him to remain seated, clasping him in her arms

"You are no longer the same. You used to take me on your knees and kiss me. In those days you gave me whatever I wanted."

He replied coldly, "In those days you were a little girl."

Sobbing, while tears rolled down her cheeks, she said, "You loved me then."

"But I love you, I love you, little goose," he answered, "but please get up, go and sit down; I will do what you ask."

"You will pay her train fare, then, and will help her to have her child?"

"Of course," said my uncle.

"I adore you, I adore you. Don't say a word of this to maman. You know her, she would feel obliged to kick up the devil of a row." Françoise thereupon threw her arms round his neck while he became scarlet.

Suddenly he appeared to lose his head; overcome by the close contact of her supple body yielded to him so trustingly, and unable to resist longer in the half-obscurity of the room, he drew her over to a large armchair into which they both sank.

With a bound I fled to my room where Miss Hayes was just concluding a game of patience.



"Why are you so agitated?" she asked, fingering the king of hearts she was about to play.

"For no reason, but I don't understand it."

"What are you talking about?"

"About the shooting stars on a summer night," I replied, not quite truthfully.

"I adore your uncle," Françoise confessed to me the next day, "and I believe he adores me."

"I hope so, but what has happened to your love for Gabriel de Loches?" I asked in surprise.

"I am all mixed up," she admitted in some confusion. "I really think, Biquette, that I have a heart like an artichoke, with a leaf for everyone."

After the fire grandfather came to see Louis to thank him for his help. "Without you and your men I don't know what we should have done. Let us hope it will not happen again. Anyway, for once, I do not blame Jeanne for discharging that scamp of a butler who started the blaze."

"He is obviously a dangerous character. Are you going to have him arrested?"

"Not only that, but he is continually drunk. Think of it, in four weeks he got away with a large part of my best Chambertin. Unfortunately I have no definite proof that would put him in prison."

"How was the opening of your shoot this year?" asked Uncle Louis, by way of changing the conversation.

"Excellent, the partridges were well-grown and strong on the wing. It is too bad that you don't appreciate the sport, my boy."

"It is too cruel. I prefer this," and sitting down at the piano he began playing the song to the evening star from *Tannhäuser*.

"You are a real artist. I wonder from whom you got your talent."

Grandfather was asked to stay for dinner and enjoyed himself complaining about the Protestants. "They even frighten my little granddaughter," he concluded, glancing at me affectionately.

"Oh, yes," I piped up, delighted at getting a chance to enter the grown-up conversation. "I don't like them at all, you can understand why."

"I understand, Biquette," said grandfather, "they have every fault, and are stingy as rats besides. Just imagine, they never give a single tip to my servants."

"Now, you two Catholic extremists, don't be so intransigent," Louis put in. "There are exceptions to every rule. I know many Protestants who are charming, full of virtues and always honourable. You must admit that you can put your money in their banks with complete confidence."

"You are right in that," admitted grandfather; "unfortunately, it is not the nice ones who belong to my wife's family. Really, there is nothing that annoys me so much as to hear them on Sundays chanting the Psalms in our drawing-room." Then, changing the course of his thoughts, he remarked that Uncle Louis had a really splendid Vouvray wine, and asked Séraphin to pour him out another glass.

In my bedroom I said to myself, Now Simone, go to sleep. But sleep would not come. Everything tickled; my blood seemed to be hop-skippping about beneath my skin. A pretty thought arrived; I played with it, and began to drowse, then once more I woke to full consciousness. Soon I shall have to leave Laufleur, I repeated for the hundredth time.

Autumn is here, fading the too tender leaves of the lime trees. The hedges of hazelnut have not been able to oppose the crisp, alarming coolness of the nights. In terror they have wrapped their leaves in little brown curlyques, ready to depart shivering in terror with the first October winds. Yesterday a wasp hardly had strength to taste the currant jelly Mère Jacquelin is putting up for the Christmas season. On the warm walls of the out-buildings the pigeons sit disconsolate, the ardour of their love for once, at a low ebb. Today Uncle Louis had the fire started in the study. From the grapevine roots, burning so cosily on the hearth a yellow bouquet of flame leaped forth garlanded with smoke; the fire grew hot and gossipy. It was the first fire of the year; the prettiest of them all. We held out our hands and watched them glowing pink and translucent against the bright flames.

When I had poured the coffee, I went outside to sit on the perron in a wicker chair, and seesawed there, my eyes fixed before me.

Uncle Louis found me and burst out laughing. "What are young girls thinking about?" he asked teasingly.

"I don't want to go back to Paris; I would rather stay here all the year with you."

"If you were not so young, if I were not so old, it would end in a marriage," he warned.

"Don't joke, Uncle Louis, I am sad at leaving. I have never been so happy in my life."

"My poor baby, you will come back next year. Put on your hat, we will go and spend the evening at Ingouville. I will play a piano duet with the beautiful Nicole."

And you will kiss pretty Françoise in a corner, I thought.

With my head resting on the shoulder of my governess, I listened to the wind whistling against the windows of our train compartment, on the way to Paris.

"What a lovely summer we have had, Miss Hayes, and what an unhappy life is waiting for us in the city . . . the convent, lessons, and winter."

"Don't forget about my rheumatism," the old woman jested.

Sitting silently at my desk I was dreaming about paradise: not the one to which Mademoiselle Spanker referred so often and with such rapt emotion; but to another, unknown to her or the other lofty-minded women of the school. My paradise contained my friends in Touraine, nymphs that resembled Isor or Françoise, a satyr with dark, sleek hair, love of a violent kind, green trees, wild flowers, and rustic songs.

Numbed by the leisure of her long summer vacation, Tata chattered continuously about her beloved Burgundy, where the grapes were already being gathered. Alice for her part related how she had become a little squiffy from drinking cider in Normandy. But when all the servants had described their holidays in excessive detail, they finally concluded that it was time to climb back on the treadmill.

Gérard called again on his way between trains, and seemed more charming than ever, though this time somehow I felt he was rather boyish and immature. He asked me for another photograph—"But not in your communion dress, I want a real one, please."

The next to appear was Sir Ronald, on a flying visit, looking very elegant with an orchid in his buttonhole. Kissing me affectionately, he exclaimed, "Ah, my little simple Simone, how pretty you are getting! Maxence, bring her over to England with you—we will marry her off to the best there is."

At the end of October I got a letter from Françoise saying that she was returning to Paris. She went on in her usual well-informed manner:

Mother is as nervous as a cat, and says she will be back soon. Louis has rented a ground-floor apartment in your street.

A few days later they all arrived. The Ruffets installed themselves once more with Madame de Granville; Louis moved into his new quarters.

The moment I saw Françoise, my curiosity could not delay asking her, "How goes your romance with Uncle Louis?"

"It is a fearful story . . . Gabriel got wind of the affair, and beat me."

"Beat you! Where did it happen?"

"In the chestnut wood."

Hullo, I thought, he spends his time in the woods, and beats other women besides his wife. "However did he dare beat you? It's unbelievable," I said in scandalized tones.

"He swore he would kill Louis in a duel; he would trump up an excuse on no matter what pretext, if I continued seeing him," she said, without answering my question.

"But it is terrible," and I began sobbing. "You must not see Uncle Louis any more, or I will warn him."

"Biquette, I beg you, don't make a scandal. I will not see him again, I swear it."

Louis, in his new apartment, for which papa had loaned him some furniture, suspected nothing. He invited us to come and see him. I arrived by myself.

"How small it is here, uncle. Only two rooms and a bath. Who will cook for you?"

"The janitress, Madame Dupont, here she is . . . Madame Dupont," he went on, "I don't think you know my niece."

"Certainly, Monsieur de Sizy, she is the young lady at number

sixteen. She has changed a lot lately, to be sure. There you are, they grow up without warning and push us along into our graves, my good monsieur."

Without attempting any more optimistic estimate of the circumstance, she proceeded to put some things away in a cupboard, while my uncle looked at me indulgently, as much as to say: That Madame Dupont is a character.

Every day, now, we called in the car to take Françoise with us to the convent. Madame du Ruffet had told father that it would be a great help.

"Certainly, my dear, glad to do it, glad to do anything to please you," he replied courteously. But it did not stop him from complaining. "She's a woman who makes scenes. If you had heard her yelping the other day when she found out I had gone to Biarritz . . . !" And father raised his hands to the sky in a despairing attitude of supplication.

It was true. In fact, she was screaming all through our apartment: "Those English people—I hate them! Their joy is to live a gipsy life, with no fixed abode. They don't know how to eat; they have a hundred religions, but only one sauce."

"Why are you so violent against the English?—you don't know them," said father, greatly irritated.

"I find fault with them on every count. Your friend Sir Ronald drives me crazy. All he thinks about is to drag you off on orgies—just to annoy me."

"Why, the poor man does not even know you."

"He knows very well that I exist, and he does not care a snap. That is just like the English with their egoism. Furthermore, why are you always boon companions with your wife's particular friends?"

"Look here, please don't reflect on the memory of Antoinette. I have never told you before, my dear girl, but you don't come up to her ankles. She was a great lady. As for you, you are nothing but a . . . Well, I think it is better for me to leave." And he pulled the door hard behind him.

Things were not going smoothly, it was evident. There was no doubt papa was reaching the end of his tether. Uncle Louis tried to untie the knots in that tangled situation, but father raved on: "There is nothing to be done about it. I cannot see

her again since she attacked my poor Antoinette. You see, old man, she was a saint, and the only woman with whom I could get along."

At the convent Françoise remarked, "Between your father and my mother there is a smell of things burning. He is a man she cannot master in spite of his soft appearing nature."

"'Master' papa? What a funny idea. Nobody has ever wanted to master anyone in our circle."

"Biquette, sometimes you seem very stupid, my poor girl."

"No, I assure you, Françoise, it is the first time in my life that I have heard shouting going in on the house. We never had any scenes before. I must say it is peculiar, and I cannot make it out."

At last the story atmosphere calmed down more or less, probably on account of Nicole's tears, but I could see it was only a truce. The system father employed was never to desert a woman, but he arranged things in such a way that she would desert him. It was, he thought, a more elegant termination for an affair.

The Loches on their way through Paris asked us to dinner at Prunier's. Madame du Ruffet called papa to tell him of the invitation, and added that her daughter and I were also included.

"If it pleases you we will accept," father agreed, without enthusiasm.

Prunier's! What luck, I thought. It will be amusing. I had never been there, and to see the handsome Gabriel again did not displease me either. We were eight altogether at a long table on the main floor.

"Your daughter is growing prettier every day, my dear Entremont," our host remarked, adjusting his monocle to see me better.

"People tell her that too often; it does not make her the most modest of children."

"I have ordered a bisque of crayfish and roast partridges; but as I did not know whether you liked oysters, I considered it better to wait and see," Madame de Loches informed us.

Papa, turning toward me, shook his head. "My daughter does not eat oysters."

I made a fearful grimace, confirming his statement.

"All right, but don't try to disgust the others."

During dinner I was sitting not far from Monsieur de Loches, and his foot touched mine. In spite of himself, he looked at me with a smile. Embarrassed, I turned my face quickly away.

"Do you care for some cheese?" asked Madame de Loches.

"She does not eat cheese," father refused for me. He had become somewhat anxious lately on my account in regard to highly seasoned food.

"She has been brought up like a chick in an incubator," remarked Madame du Ruffet ironically. "Between those three men, the poor child is completely besotted."

"It's not so bad as that," said Gabriel quickly. "I have the impression that she has a head on her shoulders and some very definite ideas of her own."

"Really, it is astonishing how clearly you see the matter, my friend; but the truth is she has made us poor old men besotted," father smiled.

At a certain moment during the meal it seemed to me that the glance of Madame de Loches hastened from the face of Françoise to her husband's with an anxious demeanour. I am always seeing things that do not exist, I reassured myself. In spite of this consoling reflection I could no longer avoid keeping a corner of my eye on the lady's faded and livid countenance. She gave the impression of a dead leaf, while Nicole looked fresh as a rose. Poor Madame de Loches evoked a thousand questions: I wondered whatever it could be that she put on her hair so as to produce every kind of mahogany shade though still leaving the roots white; why did she have long hairs in her nose and a moustache besides? Where was it possible for her to buy a dress with so many unbecoming colour combinations, and cut as though fashioned at *la foire aux puces*. I speculated on these matters while picking her to pieces from head to foot.

Nicole the other day insisted, however, that Madame de Loches had all kinds of pretensions on account of her fortune. According to Françoise she clung desperately to Gabriel because no other man ever noticed her. She is just a leftover, I decided pitilessly, and quitted her with my eyes. The face of the ex-wife, frail and much-beaten "weeping willow" came to my mind.

Françoise had confided to me one day, "You know, Gabriel never speaks of the 'ex'. Between you and me, I believe she committed suicide."

"Biquette, you appear very vague," said father, suddenly cutting short my thoughts. "Dip a lump of sugar in my *fine*; it will wake you up. It is time, as a matter of fact, for the girls to go to bed," he concluded a few moments later with an annoying smile after consulting his watch. "The sandman is here."

"It has been a charming evening," we all chorused, as we left amid bows and protestations of gratitude fit for a royal function.

"Goodnight, Biquette, keep on getting prettier."

"I will do my best, Monsieur de Loches," but behind his back I stuck my tongue out at him.

"I say, Gabriel is paying court to you openly," Françoise threw at me the next day as we were leaving Mass.

"You are seeing double, my poor girl, jealousy is choking you. How would you like to go to the cinema this afternoon? It might change your ideas," I said, to calm her down.

"It is impossible. I have arranged to meet him at four o'clock. Marguerite, the maid, will accompany me—she has just returned from her village, where she had her baby, by the way."

"Poor wretch! Did your mother find out about the trouble?"

"Of course not."

"You had better look out for Mère Loches; she was watching you last night in no friendly manner."

"Do you think so?" she asked in a fright.

"Miss Hayes, let's take the subway, it goes faster than the train," I suggested to my governess, early one evening. It was really to satisfy my curiosity, as I had never travelled that way before.

"All right, let's take it if you wish."

I realized very quickly that the Métro smelled strongly of disinfectant, and that you got squeezed almost to death in the cars. In another moment I discovered another disadvantage. Someone was pinching me firmly. I turned round, thoroughly angry, and saw only a very conservative gentleman, looking straight in front of him with an expression of complete detachment. Beside him was a housewife, her arms filled with so many pack-

ages that she was obviously unable to move a finger. Who could have been the pincher? . . . Who was pinching me again? "It is infernal," I said, feeling sore and outraged; "Miss Hayes, let's get off at the next station; I will explain to you later." On the platform I asked if they had also pinched her.

"Who? me? what do you mean?"

"Well, it's astonishing. I don't understand it at all."

At the beginning of winter, Françoise exclaimed with scarcely concealed envy, "Biquette the beloved, there she goes with my maman busy as a beaver, making purchases in every shop."

It so happened that father had been asked by a racing friend, "Who is that pretty little thing with whom I saw you on Sunday?"

"My daughter, damn it, what do you take me for? I am not so old or so decrepit as to interest myself in other girls of that age."

"Congratulations, old boy, your 'get' is charming."

"Nicole," he remarked the next day, "would you be so kind as to undertake the buying of Simone's clothes?"

"With pleasure, Maxence."

On our way to the shopping district she explained, "All men are the same, if they are flattered everything goes well . . . Your father has had compliments about you, and now he is ready to buy as many dresses as you want, because you have a pretty face."

"How about women?" I asked. "What do they feel?"

"To a woman a ravishing girl—like Françoise for instance—is a mirror in which to see herself as she once was. She says, Now look at yourself, your eyes, your lips, your wrinkles; lift up the hair around your temples, and do not forget it is necessary to know how to grow old."

We came back from our shopping covered with frost; there were snowflakes in the folds of our clothes, white epaulets adorned the shoulders of our cloaks. This new-fallen snow was a rarity in Paris, an almost unique event. The white eddies captured on the wing tasted like dusty sherbet. In my bedroom I listened with one ear to the whispering of the snow seeping along the cracks of tight-closed shutters. The icy streets of the

Capital gave off sonorous tones. In the Bois de Boulogne the frozen surface of the lakes, swept clean by the wind, reflected the myriad branchings of the trees with exquisite fidelity. But these unexpected beauties of winter in the city did not make me forget my enchanted Touraine. Pensively I imagined that Lau-fleur must in fact resemble one of those sparkling post-cards I sent out so faithfully with New Year greetings. The pine trees in the park, burdened each hour more and more, at last had to relinquish their soft white loads in small avalanches, and the evergreen branches would spring up once more to their former jaunty attitudes with little swishings of relief.

Miss Hayes brought me back sharply from my esthetic engrossment. "Now, stop dreaming, Simone, you have masses of letters to write; you must get to work."

News had come that my brother had had a relapse and must remain in bed at the sanatorium for two months. Father had lectured me about him. He said that I took no interest in the poor boy, and never wrote.

Then there was Cathy, also in a hospital at Leysin. She had been begging for my news, and was no doubt fearfully depressed, thinking about me—lucky girl—bearing the same name, but with healthy bones. Uncle Louis had said, speaking of her, "She is *une fin de race*. The good blood in the family has thinned out to nothing, poor little girl." As for my brother, he must have been also a *fin de race*. According to that, I had escaped their fate by a miracle.

Everyone spent time and effort preventing me from eating. "Above all, she must not get fat; her weight is perfect at present. No more starch for her at meals," father laid down. "And no more cheese it is bad for her complexion; give her fewer sweets, and some good purges," he went on.

On my way home from the convent, sometimes I stopped at a pastrycook's to buy a *baba au rhum*. Miss Hayes, as my accomplice in crime, was terrified at what Monsieur le Comte would say if he knew. Clearly it was annoying to be ill, but it was also annoying to be too healthy, I thought, looking with unconcealed desire at the chocolate éclairs bulging with whipped cream. My governess, guessing my thoughts without fatiguing her imagination, explained, "In life one must learn how to do

nothing to excess. If you limit yourself to moderation you will always be happy."

"Yes, Miss Hayes." Within myself I reflected life must be pretty dull that way.

The front doorbell rang at exactly eight o'clock one morning. Papa in accordance with his invariable custom, cried out, "Pinched!" Also following his custom he promptly threw his check cap beneath an armchair.

Adrien announced immediately, "Monsieur de Sizzy."

"Let him in, let him in!" said father, quickly recovering his cap and dipping his lips again into his breakfast cup of coffee. "You are pale as death, old man!" he exclaimed when he saw Louis' face appear in the doorway. "What brings you here at such an early hour?"

"Simone," my uncle requested, kissing me, "will you please leave? I want to talk with your father."

As I walked out of the room on lingering feet, I could see father staring anxiously, while my uncle's voice continued through the door which I had left just a fraction ajar.

"Guillaume du Ruffet blew his brains out last night."

"What! But it is appalling, there I am . . ." the last words escaped papa involuntarily. "How do you know it?" he asked nervously.

"He left my name among those to be notified immediately, together with a letter. Here it is."

A short silence followed while father was reading, then he said, "Poor fellow, gambling finally brought him low. These last lines about his daughter are touching, but if he loved her so much why did he ruin himself that way?"

"You see he was weak, without a home, without much money. He was simply a provincial who burned himself out in the life of Paris. I think Nicole is much to blame in all this."

"I should not be surprised," interjected father. Then, as if talking to himself, he continued, "To eat, drink, and sleep together is pretty close to marriage, it seems to me."

Just then the telephone started ringing, and I fled. Miss Hayes scolded me, "You will be late again at the convent; you stay too long with your father in the morning."

"I cannot go to school, I am feeling bad everywhere."

"Yes, I can see you are indisposed; where are you suffering?" the old Miss asked in alarm.

"Everywhere, as I already said."

Astonished at my blunt manner, she took my pulse and put me to bed without understanding anything. In the afternoon Françoise, in tears, called on the telephone to report the death of her father.

"Simone is in bed with a headache, would you like to speak to her?" Miss Hayes asked.

"Is that you, Biquette? You know, papa died suddenly last night in a hospital from heart failure. 'Allo! Well, it does not seem to surprise you."

"Yes, it surprises me, of course," I hastened to reply.

"I adored him," she began to cry again. "It is awful. Mother will not let me go to see him. Could you come here at once, old girl?"

Sitting in her room she sobbed against the shoulder of Miss Hayes who tried to console her. "Life is only a journey, my little one, we must all die some day. See how the poor dear mother of Simone passed away in a few hours."

Clinging to her as we drove home in a cab, I confided to my governess, "It is not the same thing. Mother died of appendicitis, but he committed suicide, the poor Monsieur du Ruffet."

Horried, she listened while I told her of the tragedy. "I shall have seen everything and heard everything in this country," she said at last, making the sign of the cross.

Nicole appeared at the house covered with crêpe, and spoke of the dead man as though he had gasped his last breath in her arms. According to her story, she knew he had a rather weak heart, but had never suspected it was in such a bad state.

There is one who knows how to lie, I murmured to myself, since I had also heard her remark to the two men, in confidence: "He has behaved like a sinister fool, committing suicide like that. If it ever got out, Françoise would be lost. As if he had not done enough to ruin us both," she sobbed.

After the funeral, Sâblon returned with us for lunch. "My poor old man, you were the object of everyone's sympathy to-day," he said to father.

"Yes, I know. I shall have to marry her," he replied in a dejected tone.

"Marry her?" I screamed in anger. "Marry her? Never! If you do I will leave here and will never speak to you as long as I live."

"But, Biquette, it is a question of honour."

"I don't care about honour. She cannot come here between us. To begin with, she is a stupid old woman," I declared, suddenly becoming the deadly enemy of Nicole du Ruffet.

"You never spoke a truer word," snickered Monsieur de Sâblon, who did not like her either.

"That does not help matters, one must look at the situation coldly. I shall have to marry her," father repeated.

In a fury I started rolling on the carpet, almost in hysterics. The two men on their knees tried to pacify me.

"Listen, little one," my new-found ally promised, "I will fix things up; I have an idea; it might work."

"What is it, Monsieur de Sâblon?" I asked, slightly calmed, and feeling he was the most charming of men.

"Have confidence in me. We have a year and a half ahead of us before the engagement can be announced. For an old fox like me, that will allow plenty of time to save your father's skin."

"By the grace of God," mumbled papa, with an expression like a saint in a stained-glass window.

"Since Louis has been living next door he never leaves your apartment," Madame du Ruffet complained a few days later. No doubt she was seeking to monopolize father. "Furthermore, my poor Maxence, your house is like a waiting-room in a station. People are coming in and going out at all hours," she continued aggressively.

"I have never hidden from you the fact that I have many friends."

"Many too many."

"It was like that in my mother's house, it was like that when Antoinette was alive. Custom becomes second nature," said father quizzically.

"You have some bad habits."

"Very possibly. There are two I cling to strongly: the love of pretty girls, and the vice of friendship. Both I like, and will continue cultivating them all the rest of my life."

"You talk as though you were an old bachelor," said Nicole, pretending to jest, but afraid of irritating father.

For his part, he was content to glance at me with a look which said much.

After dinner Françoise suggested we should play dominoes, and I followed her without objection into the smoking-room, though still feeling emotionally upset by the conversation. I asked myself what Monsieur de Sâblon could do.

"What are you thinking about, Biquette?"

"Nothing."

"You little liar, you are worried because of your father and my mother."

"Are they going to get married?"

"I hope not. They quarrel enough already. After marriage it would be even worse, the poor souls."

"She is an infernal person," I said frankly.

"Yes and no; she does not understand how to live in peace with anyone except Aunt Granville, from whom she hopes to inherit, and with me whom she fears."

"That is an idea. If papa cannot escape her I will advise him to try a whip."

"*Mon Dieu*, you are not easygoing!" she burst out laughing.

In view of her deep mourning, my friend had no way to keep occupied. To my mind the Christmas holiday festivities were too formal. Every day there were teas and hops, where in the twinkling of an eye I kept meeting new people. Papa suggested giving a party in return.

"Not before Easter, if you don't mind. All the Sundays in January are already booked, and for Mardi gras I would rather have a few intimate friends, so that Françoise can be present for Pancake Day. Be sure, by the way, to throw one up on top of the cupboard, so we can be rich for the rest of the year."

"That is an old custom of Burgundy. Your poor mother took it very seriously," papa remarked sadly.

On New Year's Day, I leaped out of bed and rushed all over the house to exchange good wishes and kisses with everyone.

There were numberless boxes of candy, of *marrons glacés*, of books and other gifts. This year my father's friends had swamped me with presents.

"You are too spoiled," they all said when I recounted what I had received.

The snow of December on the threshold of a new year had made me shiver. In spite of all those packages, so enticing in tissue paper and silver ribbon, an inward feeling of loneliness held and enveloped me in a nervous anxiety that kept me close to tears. Today a new year had arrived, full of mysteries. Would it bring bitterness and sorrow in its train? It was the first time that I had considered such matters or had made any attempt to face life beyond the exigencies of the next few minutes.

The telephone kept ringing. "'Allo!" I answered.

It was Uncle Louis. "Happy New Year!" he called.

"All my best wishes, uncle, and thank you a thousand times for the stole and muff in opossum fur, it is so luxurious I am stunned. How sweet you are! . . . Yes, father is right, I received too many *marrons glacés*. Come in this afternoon, and I will pass on some boxes to you."

"Happy New Year, Biquette; it is Françoise," was the next call. "Happy New Year!" . . . "Happy New Year!" The telephone kept ringing.

Papa hurried about all day long signing his name in the books of the numerous royal princes he cultivated. In the course of the year they would honour him with condescending little greetings, or boring invitations, to acknowledge his devotion.

In the Avenue du Bois that morning I encountered Françoise, and noticed there was something new in her looks. "One might think that you have a black eye," I opined, questioningly.

"Look out what you are saying, and keep it to yourself," she replied, slightly alarmed at my suggestion. Then, like a good friend, she went on under her breath, "Well, from you I cannot keep anything, you inquisitive magpie, it is lamp-black."

"What's it for?"

"To make my eyes look bigger, silly." It was not long before she was putting powder on her face.

Though the colour was far too white, I begged her at once to give me some in a little box, much to the horror of Miss Hayes.

"You look like painted lilies," she said critically.

Father was also scandalized at the effect, forgetting that it was he who had first put powder on my nose. "Biquette, you are going to spoil your skin! You can't afford that. The one thing which saves you is your splendid complexion. By the way, Miss Hayes, throw away all the *marrons glacés*, and give her no bread. I have a new theory that bread is bad for people. We French eat too much of it . . ." and there he was discussing with my astonished Englishwoman the danger of starches in general and of bread in particular.

When friends asserted that I was pretty, father smiled with delight, though he did not like to admit openly what he thought on the subject. "Pretty? Well, if she had had the good sense to take after her mother, it would be true; but unfortunately she looks like me, the poor kid, and you know Praxiteles would never have taken me for his model."

Mysteriously he asked me into his room one day. "I want to tell you something confidential, Biquete. Uncle Louis is coming to dine tonight with Madame Gouy—a very fine lady," he hastened to add remembering my offended attitude when introduced once to some guests of doubtful quality. "Above everything do not tell the Ruffets. Nicole and Madame Gouy don't speak."

"You need not worry, I won't say a word," I promised. Later in the evening I came into the drawing-room, in which all the lights were burning, to make a curtsy to an old lady with an aristocratic face. The two men were showing her every mark of respect. I liked Madame Gouy for several reasons. She had a noble air in spite of her unpretentious dress, and her expression seemed both gracious and intelligent. All through the evening the same question kept revolving in my head—she is charming, but why was she invited? She is neither beautiful, young, nor titled, and she does not smell of perfume so as to make you sick; why, then . . . ?

After dinner I helped Miss Hayes serve coffee in the drawing-room and then, making a final good-night curtsy, I went out, leaving the door slightly open. They have something serious to discuss, those three, I said to myself. I must know what is up. But my governess retraced her steps and closed the door quietly.

She then reproved me, remarking, "A door should be either open or shut, you little monkey."

At the Ascension my studies did not improve. Each week my report card provided a sorry commentary on my behaviour. The entries read: "Lazy, spends her time dreaming, talks in class, forgets to go to chapel." Father was not pleased, though he once admitted that it had been the same with him at his school. That semester Roberte Langlois, a new pupil, asked me if I would help her in getting acquainted with the regulations and strict régime of the convent. She was a robust but supple girl with a clear, rosy skin. Her father, the president of the Paris Order of Advocates, was an influential man, according to her. In a short time we became close friends. I taught her the chants and rules of the school. In particular, among other things, I showed her how to acquire the cabalistic scrawl that all the girls at the Ascension had learned to write. Every fashionable convent in France extolled in those days its own particular style. It was a sort of elegant snobbery, designed chiefly, no doubt with the intention of covering up mistakes in orthography, which as well-brought-up and consequently illiterate young ladies, we accumulated with such appalling ease in our written effusions.

One afternoon during our studies Roberte passed me a sealed envelope containing an invitation to tea for a Sunday in February. I accepted with pleasure. That evening as we were returning on the tram I handed the letter to my governess.

"Who is she?" asked Miss Hayes.

"She is the daughter of a great advocate," I explained importantly.

"An advocate? You had better ask your father," my Englishwoman advised. It had not occurred to me to reflect that she had always a distinct horror of everything that had to do with men of law. She had, in fact, once remarked that a lawyer will eat your horse for breakfast.

Recovering a little from these thoughts I said, "Papa will surely let me go to the party."

"We shall see," she replied doubtfully.

"Papa!" I cried out at the moment when he was closing the door of his private hall in haste to dress for dinner. "Papa, I am

asked to a party on the seventeenth of February by Mademoiselle Langlois, the daughter of the president of the Advocates."

"Langlois, Langlois? That name seems to mean something to me. Well, we will talk about it again, my little one," and he pulled the door shut, leaving me without an answer.

"Biquette, I repeat, you cannot accept the invitation of Mademoiselle Langlois," he declared the next day, almost worn out by my arguments.

"Why not?" I asked, snivelling.

"I beg you to understand that you cannot go around with people of another set, and, besides, Monsieur Langlois is the attorney of my mother-in-law."

"Of Grandmother Montigny?"

"No, of the wife of my father."

"The wife of your father? Grandmother Entremont? She has been dead a hundred years," I replied, incredulously.

"To tell the truth, it is a sad story," said father at last. "After my dear mother died, father married a woman—an impossible creature—who was schoolmistress in the village of Entremont." Papa's face clouded as he recalled the event. "She was a schoolteacher, I say. Just imagine how your Uncle Sosthène and I suffered! When I refused to see the woman, my father immediately notified me through his notary that he cursed me and disinherited me. Poor mother must have turned in her grave."

"Did he do the same with Uncle Sosthène?"

"Yes, just the same."

"Well, where does Monsieur Langlois come into the affair?"

"Father died three years ago. His wife has engaged Maître Langlois to represent her against my brother and me. We immediately attacked the will, of course. His method of cutting us off had been to leave everything to his widow and to the museum of Barsur-Seine which he had founded; but through employing the best lawyer in Paris, Raymond Poincaré, the same who is now President of the Republic, we won our case."

"Monsieur le Président did that for you?" I said with admiration. "How strange, and how small the world is!" Feeling somewhat upset at this story of my grandfather, and having nevertheless some sympathy for the schoolmistress and her

romance, I went to find Miss Hayes. "You are an old tight-mouth, when I think that you have never mentioned to me the story of how Grandfather Entremont abandoned us for the love of a woman."

"Let the servants talk scandals, if they wish; that is not proper for governesses," she said offended. "You must understand that I have passed through life seeing nothing. It is the only method to make one's way, in my position."

Father took me to tea at the Ruffets', where I found Françoise engrossed in a novel.

"Sunday is a dull day," said Nicole stretching her body lazily. "If I were not in full mourning I would go to hear Monsieur Bergson speak, and afterwards I would eat strawberry tarts at Rumpelmayer's."

"It is fortunate that you are in mourning," said father, smiling; "Monsieur Bergson is tedious and cakes are fattening; but I agree that Sunday is a fearful day, unless one goes to the races or to Puteaux."

While they were talking thus, the hero in Françoise's novel was about to clasp the heroine in a passionate embrace, so I went to look out of the window and admire that sunny winter day. In the street groups of loungers in their Sunday clothes were strolling arm in arm with their children. They walked straight before them, but they were going nowhere. It was a curious spectacle to watch Parisians on days of rest. Almost in silence they flowed through the canyons of the streets, resigned to being bored, with nothing to do except kill time until they must once more return to work.

Sundays are exhausting; the family is quite right, I yawned, and left my vantage-point at the window. All the same I reflected that there was really small cause for me to complain. Nearly always I was invited to visit with friends, and from the beginning of spring I went to the Tir aux Pigeons, where it amused me particularly to watch the tennis players fluttering about the courts. They were very poor performers, I must confess, but out of the top draw socially.

At this moment Madame de Granville entered the drawing-room and was politely offered an armchair. "As for me, I should

like to stay in bed on Sunday," she declared, joining immediately in the topic under discussion.

"Stay in bed? What a funny idea, auntie; only fast girls stay in bed in the daytime," said Nicole.

"Perhaps that is why they look fresher than society women," father let slip unguardedly.

Madame du Ruffet shrugged her shoulders, and was about to make a rather cutting reply, I suppose, when she saw the door opening, and two more guests came in. The first was a young woman with a pretty though slightly drawn face. She was closely followed by Uncle Louis. There was no doubt that the new arrival was smart. Her slim figure seemed as though moulded into a beautifully cut tailor-made of deep crimson velvet. The jacket was narrow above and belled out below in a long embroidered flare, reaching to her knees, where it formed a second little skirt. Round her shoulders she wore a sable stole.

I was standing in the middle of the room examining this striking lady in detail, when I was called back out of my concentration by Nicole. "Now then, girls, come and pass the sandwiches and the chocolate cake. Do you like milk in your tea, my dear?" And Nicole began to be exceedingly busy, as is necessary under such conditions.

Watching her, it occurred to me that she seemed much too fat beside the svelte newcomer. I remembered how she had once talked to me of old age with something of despair in her voice, and if I had dared I should have whispered to her: Madame du Ruffet, no more cakes; to grow a little fatter means to grow a little older.

Still much occupied with helping her guests, she was offering a cup of tea to papa; but he cried out, waving his hands as if terrified, "No, thank you, my dear, no tea for me, no tea, please, I am not feeling ill!" It made me laugh because papa always maintained that tea was a drink for invalids.

Uncle Louis was becoming restless. He had managed to get Françoise away from her novel and I could see them discussing something together. A moment later he suggested taking her and me to the Hippodrome. "We can catch the Métro and get off just opposite the theatre," he added.

"Well, in that case, I shan't go," I said abruptly.

"Why ever not?" he asked.

"Because they pinch your behind in the Métro," I assured him, speaking with conviction.

A sudden cold chill invaded the room.

"Simone, that is awful; what are you talking about? Your remark is frightful," said Nicole angrily.

"It is simply the truth. Ask Miss Hayes. Anyway, how can you know, madame? You have never even taken a street-car in your life."

Louis, with an amused smile, hastened to declare, "It is not always nice to tell the truth. Anyway, Biquette, I will not let you run into such danger; we will go in a taxi."

That day, as it happened, was the Sunday for which Roberte Langlois had invited me. I could still remember noticing with some astonishment how her soft blue eyes filled with tears which, like glass beads, slowly rolled down her pink cheeks when I informed her that I could not come.

"Then you absolutely cannot?" she repeated in distress. "I have been looking forward with such joy to the thought of introducing you to my brother, to mother, and to father," she began sobbing.

For my part I was so stupefied and overwhelmed that I had to sit down, without knowing what to say. The idea that someone could suffer on my account had never entered my head. "Listen, don't cry. I will come another time," I promised so as to comfort her.

"You see, I adore you," she murmured—to my growing surprise. "With your slender figure, your long hair, and your high forehead, you look like a woman in a primitive Flemish picture. On Sunday when I see you in the Bois in those exceedingly smart clothes, my heart beats." Taking my hand she pressed it to her lips.

Frightened, with a fear I could not explain in my innocence, I drew back my fingers quickly and fled, saying only, "Excuse me but I don't like to be kissed."

Sitting by myself one evening in the smoking-room, after reflecting for a long time and trembling in every limb, I decided to telephone. " 'Allo, 'allo, the Count de Sâblon, please; Made-

moiselle d'Entremont is speaking! 'Allo! Is it you, monsieur? Excuse my disturbing you, I only wanted to know how your plan was working to save papa from this impossible marriage . . . No. . . . She does not leave him for a moment, and she's getting fatter every day. Monsieur de Sâblon, I assure you, she is a bitter woman. She will make us all unhappy. Even her own daughter hates her. And that is easy to understand. She is always saying to me, 'Who brought you up, my dear child?' Everything annoys her. She does not like my uncles and cannot bear you either, monsieur. As for poor Sir Ronald, he is her pet aversion."

"She must have a sweet disposition," he interrupted at the other end of the wire. "You did well to refresh my memory on the subject. We must beat the iron while it is hot," he ended cryptically. "Good-night, darling, sleep in peace, I will arrange everything."

A few days later Françoise confided to me: "Maman went to dine last night at Monsieur de Sâblon's house. She was wearing a dress that was almost pink. *There* is one who does not grow rusty in crêpe."

During the week she gave me some fresh news: "Mother has asked the Duke d'Argoux for tea this afternoon. You remember him; he is that round little man who took such a fancy to her last summer at Louis' party. She met him again, by chance, at the dinner to which she was asked by Monsieur de Sâblon."

So that is the idea of the old fox, I thought, without saying anything. I could see the combination: Monsieur d'Argoux, rich, fat, and very titled.

Nicole began to telephone us less frequently, she went out mysteriously at night dressed in her finest clothes. In the circumstances father could scarcely be blamed if he departed to stay with Sir Ronald in England. Ten days or so later he wrote:

My dear Nicole:

Bless you for the immense happiness you have given me. I am returning to you herewith several letters which, now that they are in your possession, make you once more your own mistress. After earnest reflection I have concluded that you could be much happier with the Duke d'Argoux. This ex-

plains my present decision to withdraw from your life, with a broken heart.

Please accept, my dear Nicole, my respectful and most devoted homage,

Maxence.

Another fox, I thought, as I improvised a few dance-steps on the parquet floor.

"It is not so funny as all that," said Françoise, checking my demonstration of joy and replacing the stolen letter in her pocket. "Mother is wild with rage at being trapped that way by your father. She has forbidden me to set foot in your house again."

"Good Heavens, how awful!" I lamented, suddenly starting to cry.

"Come, now, don't cry, I will stand up to her. You and I are too good friends ever to be separated by anyone."

With these brave words we clasped hands and swore to be true comrades through life and death.

"All the same, Biquette, there is no doubt we surely have a curious set of relations," she laughed.

After two days Madame de Granville called on the phone to ask me for lunch the following Sunday. Françoise, at the convent, explained: "Don't worry, we can see each other when we like. My aunt has dotted the 'i's' and crossed the 't's' on the subject. Mother will not dare open the question again."

Sometimes on Saturday I went to pass the evening with Uncle Louis. "Biquette, would you care to come and have dinner beside the hearth of an old bachelor?" he would ask.

"Of course, my little sugar-candy uncle."

He opened the door himself, and I would find him pipe in hand, wearing a green velvet smoking-jacket.

"I bow deeply before you, Princess."

"I greet you, Vicomte," I replied with a gracious and condescending air.

His apartment was charming, very mannish, in spite of a large bowl of flowers—no doubt specially purchased for my benefit. The place had been considerably changed since my first visit. Old hunting-prints now covered the walls and his bed-divan

matched the curtains in dark blue rep. On a dresser there were many framed photographs, including two of mother as a young girl.

"I don't resemble her at all. There is nothing to do about it, much as I should like to," I said regretfully one evening as I looked at them.

"No," he replied, getting up from his chair and examining me in profile and full face. "Just the same, Biquette, for a girl of your age you are not so bad."

Madame Dupont came in to announce as usual in a thunderous voice, "Dinner is served, Monsieur de Sisy."

It was a royal feast. Louis complained bitterly that she cooked everything with garlic—a defect of all janitresses—but I held that it was delicious anyway. "It gives a flavour, my little uncle."

"And makes you stink horribly," he always replied.

"This dessert is wonderful," I raved. It was purée of chestnuts covered with ice-cream. "If papa saw how I am stuffing myself, he would make a pretty song and dance about it."

"Your father is slightly insane on the subject of fat. Everyone weighs too much, according to him." Then, changing the conversation, he asked if I would like to hear some music. He simply doted on his new piano, and was still playing when Miss Hayes came to fetch me at nine o'clock. She would sit down beside him on such occasions and go over with delight some new four-handed piece he had dug up for her.

Returning one evening she remarked, "Your Uncle Louis was made for marriage."

How true it was. Whenever I passed a moment with him peacefulness would come upon me, and the prospect of a happy family life no longer seemed like an impossible irony.

We got a telegram from father saying that he was returning from England, and he arrived exactly as announced, accompanied by a dog. Before I had time to open my mouth, he explained, "It's a retriever for Ballou, to help him with his duck-shooting. I could have left him at Amiens, but I thought you would like to see him."

"He is adorable, papa."

It turned out that Miss Hayes proved less charmed with the

animal than I. She had to go walking with him at all hours since his habits were not so well-regulated as those of the dogs we had previously owned.

"Luckily Monsieur Ballou will be here soon to take him off our hands," said Adrien hopefully, and with ill-concealed fury at the number of puddles he had to mop up.

In fact Uncle Ballou came puffing up into the apartment a few days later, dressed entirely in black, with a joyful face such as he possessed before the interlude with the "Northern lady".

Thank Heavens, he is over his lovesickness, I reflected, feeling greatly relieved at finding once more the old Ballou. Papa is not like him when he has such troubles, he still makes merry. With his usual patience, after the fashion of men who must earn their dinner, he listened to the long stories papa loved to tell about England, where everything was *admirable* with a capital "A".

"Even for an Anglophile you are certainly too fond of the English, my dear Maxence," remarked Ballou sarcastically.

"You would be also if you went to England," father replied promptly. "They are gentlemen, those Englishmen. It is a country of gentlemen from the moment you reach Dover, where everyone addresses you in a civilized way. It is a pleasure, I can tell you, to find things so changed, when only an hour before you had been insulted in Calais by a foul-mouthed porter reeking of wine and garlic."

"You are exaggerating," Ballou stopped him.

"Not the least in the world, and as for my men friends, how agreeable they are! How wonderfully they entertain!"

"You are exaggerating," Ballou repeated. "The only time I went to England I ate nothing but *merlan en colère*. It was always followed by roast peasant cooked much too long, and then pink jellies for dessert—a truly abominable dish."

"My poor fellow, you know nothing about the country," said father, suddenly deciding that Ballou was talking like a bourgeois. Then he added, "The women there have wonderful skin . . ."

"And large feet!" exclaimed Ballou, who for once had made up his mind not to agree with him.

Nicole came to see father three days later, and left him, a dark

fire glittering in her eyes. As soon as he had politely escorted her to the door, he called Monsieur de Sâblon on the phone. With considerable emotion in his voice he said: "You have pulled a fearful thorn out of my foot, Androcles, old man. Without you I was a dead lion. The poor woman is furious but cannot reproach me. Nicole can make no claims against me in any way. She was well and truly caught in that trap, baited with the Duke d'Argoux; and now she cannot crawl out and say she never got a nibble of him. When I think what I have escaped, it still gives me the creeps. It is clear that one should not choose a wife until one has seen how she looks in a night-cap, but then it is sometimes extremely sad and difficult to call off the affair. All this is between you and me, naturally. Above all, don't mention it at the club. From now on I consider you like a blood brother. All the same, Bertrand, I should not like you to think that I have not adored Nicole. There was a time when I could not imagine life without her. She has some defects, of course, but she is very exquisite. Well, it is over with now, and my experience with a society woman inclines me to prefer less complicated persons. If I ever have anything to do with women again, which I doubt, it will be someone younger and from another class."

"Monsieur de Sâblon, Monsieur de Sâblon," I screamed, kissing him affectionately when next I saw him. "You have saved our lives. What a wonderful man you are! Father must give you a fine present."

"That is a good idea. I shall ask him for your hand in marriage—with a large dowry, of course," the old man smiled; and he returned my kisses with interest on my hair and forehead.

"Have you finished mauling my daughter?" father objected, half-annoyed, as he pulled me quickly from his arms. "Now that she is growing up, all my friends are forever sending her candy, flowers, and tender messages. I shall soon have to shut her up in a nunnery somewhere."

"When the roosters are loose, it is time to chase your fowls into the hennerly," observed Monsieur de Sâblon; and they both laughed in chorus at his judicious remark.

About this time papa began to seek distraction at night with

various members of his club. They went to Maxim's together and amused themselves vastly at playing practical jokes, generally instigated by a Monsieur Maurice Bertrand. This gentleman became known as "*Le Monsieur de chez Maxim's*", and I frequently heard stories about his exploits, which in those days delighted the fatuous tastes of those present.

In this circle of old friends, whose chief claim to fame was based on the fact that they always passed their evenings in the same way, papa spent many sleepless nights. Following the dictates of that frivolous era, his group met in the *omnibus de chez Maxim's*, where they drank countless bottles of *brut* champagne until the hour when it was proper to ascend the slopes of Montmartre for a visit to l'Abbaye de Thélème. Finally, after much music and dancing, they migrated to the *halles*, where they completed the evening with an early breakfast of coffee, hot bread, and sweet butter such as cannot be duplicated anywhere except in Paris. These evenings were not, of course, entirely devoid of feminine society. The fine-feathered ladies with whom they associated had perhaps been pretty housemaids, discovered somewhere in the provinces, who in Paris had promptly become covered with chinchillas. But in spite of this change in their status, they remained with few exceptions housemaids.

From what I overheard on the subject of these women, there lingers with me only an impression of infinite vulgarity, venality, and profligacy. It really seems unbelievable that well-brought-up men, of the best families in the world, could have found pleasure in such society. Possibly because they were born in homes of good manners they wished to try something different. These ladies of the half-world were scarcely angels of sweetness. Papa told stories concerning an acquaintance who received slaps openly from his mistress in front of everyone, and of a Madame Rita who whipped her lover on the floor of Maxim's because he refused to give her a hundred thousand francs. Such tales horrified me, particularly because I met at our house some of father's friends. They made a bad impression. One of them, a Prince Irloff, left me speechless. He was loaded down with enormous jewels, with black pearls in his shirt front, and diamonds in his cuff links. They called him "the walking

jewellery shop". With a smile on his lips, and a strong Russian accent, he said, "Maxence, why don't you bring your daughter to my parties? I am very fond of young people."

"Later, later," father replied evasively.

In fact I had no desire to go to his house. Someone had told me that in order to discipline his numerous servants he beat them frequently with a knout.

Another of father's friends was a champagne salesman. To succeed in his business he had to drink with all his customers. His complaints broke my heart. "What a pig of a business! I spend my time getting drunk and taking purges to get over it. It will kill me. I shall die young. What a pig of a business! What a pig of a business!" He did die, as it turned out, but it was from old age.

Uncle Louis hated Maxim's. "It is a fearful whorehouse, where you throw your money away for the privilege of yawning. My little Maxence, you will ruin yourself there," he said reprovingly. He preferred society, or even cabdrivers. When he happened to be returning home late in the evening, it caused him great pleasure to hire a fiacre and be driven to one of those small restaurants where the cabmen met. He would invite his own driver to join him, and would listen for hours to the stories of those old fellows, offering them in the meantime a multitude of beers.

For no apparent reason I woke one morning with a pain in my spine. After considerable discussion Doctor Vaquez was called in to see me. He had become a most important man in the Faculté de Médecine. So important, in fact, that he no longer visited patients in their homes; they had to go to him at his office. His specialty was the heart. Nevertheless, for this little girl whom he felt he had once saved from certain death, he was willing to make an exception.

"It is unbelievable how much she has changed," he exclaimed when he saw me. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes, Monsieur Vaquez."

"Are you still afraid of my black beard?"

"Yes, Monsieur Vaquez, but it is no longer black, you know. It is getting a little grey."

"Really? Nobody has ever dared to tell me that before," and he began chuckling to himself.

After a prolonged auscultation he turned angrily towards Miss Hayes. "She rides sidesaddle, does she?"

"Yes, doctor."

"Has none of you ever noticed that it has deformed her thigh?"

"No, doctor."

"It is abominable, that is all!" he exclaimed in a furious voice. In father's smoking-room he prescribed, "No more riding, her studies must be cut down, she must eat foods containing calcium, she must spend the whole summer at Biarritz, take hot salt-water baths, and go swimming twenty times. Without all this," he concluded, "she will turn out like the other children of your family." With a funereal look, he slipped on his overcoat. "Bring her to me every two weeks until she leaves," he ordered, closing the door firmly behind him.

As soon as he had gone, I rushed to look in a mirror, and asked myself: Are you also a *fin de race*? But the bright side of the picture suddenly came to my mind. After all it will not be so bad; with reduced studies Mademoiselle Spanker can no longer find fault when my marks for the week's work are read out on Mondays. Papa at once sent her a note with directions that had the effect of excusing me from any mental effort at all.

"It is the doctor's orders," said Mademoiselle Spanker grimly. "That ought to make you very happy."

I turned my head away so as to avoid laughing in her face and replied, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

She went on, "I am wondering why you are being sent here." Then, thinking about the fees papa had paid in advance for my tuition, she concluded, smiling like a shark, "Well, we are still glad you are staying on with us."

Speaking with Miss Hayes on the subject, I remarked, "She is also glad to keep me because of my name *en courant d'air*." I knew that Mademoiselle Spanker was much awed by the noble blood and titles of her pupils.

From the attitude of my governess it seemed as though I were on the verge of death. "Take your pills, keep on eating until you are no longer hungry; your father came near killing you

with his diets and theories about bread, not to speak of all those purges," and she wagged her head gravely in disapproval. "At your age, what madness it was to try and make you thin."

Roberte asked me anxiously, "Can a disease of the bones kill you?"

"Of course," I replied, enchanted at finding myself to be such an interesting case.

"Then I will make a novena for you, so that you will live. Which is your favourite saint?"

Without hesitation I answered: "Saint Anthony, because, you see, he helps you to find anything in the world, even health. Not only that, but I love him because of his little pink pig. There is nothing prettier than a little pig."

Shaking her finger, she murmured, "You haven't got true faith."

I thought she was wrong; I simply liked to jest slightly about everything. Really I adored without question the ceremonies and observances of our Church, while its peace and devotion entered into my very soul. The festivals of the seasons also stirred me, and the days distinguished by a gift or a traditional cake. Without realizing it I was doubtless particularly enamoured of the branch of box and the coloured eggs on Easter Day, of the rose petals for the festival of Corpus Christi, and, in short, of all those touching details which soften so beautifully the Catholic religion.

At Easter, Françoise decided to go and visit her grandparents, the Ruffets. Since the death of their son they had promptly become much attached to their only descendant, whom they scarcely knew and to whom they were now continually writing letters. Nicole, meanly, did not want to let her go; but Françoise had something to say in the matter, and left for Brittany one morning accompanied by Marguerite.

Commenting on this, Madame du Ruffet observed, "That girl Marguerite is most admirably devoted to her; she is really a servant with a heart of gold."

To which Louis replied, without thinking, "And no wonder!" "Why?"

"Oh," he answered, realizing that he had almost blundered, "because your daughter is so charming, my dear."

Without Françoise life was dull. I had many other friends I used to meet in the Bois or at various parties, but it was not the same. Though I went to great pains to be popular, and above all to impress that juvenile world of mine, I did not always succeed. One of the girls asked me why the men of my family had such pompous names: "Amaury, Sosthène, Maxence," she mouthed sarcastically. I suppose some grown-up had made a scathing remark on the subject.

I replied without a quiver that my ancestors belonged to that famous group, the Knights of the Round Table.

"The companions of King Arthur?" she asked incredulously. "You astonish me. Evidently you don't blow your nose with your feet!" From then on she endowed me with the nickname "Arthurette", and caused me frightful horripilation in consequence.

Miss Hayes, who detested Roberte Langlois, would not let me stop to speak with her when we happened to meet in the Bois. She claimed that Roberte created a very bad effect going about with a Pekinese dog, and that her brother did not look like a gentleman.

"Really, Miss Hayes, you are difficult to please; his eyes are so dark and beautiful, and his hair so wavy."

"Pouah! His clothes look like those of a showy adventurer," she explained, so as to enlighten me on his imperfections. Decidedly no one in that family was pleasing to her by any manner of means.

I should like to take a trip on the *impériale* of a bus so as to see Paris, I decided one day.

"That is an excellent idea," said Uncle Louis, always on the alert for something out of the ordinary. "I will take you up the Eiffel Tower, to the belfry of Notre-Dame, and to Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Let's go, Biquette. Let's look at the budding chestnut trees, at the bookstalls on the quays where they offer the treasures of knowledge for five sous. We'll admire spring once more returning from banishment—the spring of Paris with violets, primroses, and lilacs bursting into bloom. We'll laugh at the poor anæmic jonquils and at the cocky little crocuses. How brave they look, as if they did not mind being chopped

off in their youth, to promenade about on handcars and get pushed around for sale by aged dames. Perhaps beneath the milky sky of April those flowers realize the joy they bring to many a weary soul with their promise of sunny days ahead."

We made several such excursions. It was fun. One showery day I went with Miss Hayes to the stand reserved for associate members at the Horse Show.

"Don't lose your programme," my Englishwoman cautioned, as she wormed her way through the crowd, searching for two seats in the front row. But we found them all occupied by valets in livery.

"We will sit here," I said impatiently, plumping myself down beside a tall servant man, who regarded me with his eyes popping.

"No," objected Miss Hayes; "can't you see that this man is keeping those seats for his master?"

"What a system!" I exclaimed angrily. "The élite annoy me the way they grab everything for themselves."

At last we found some seats. Beside me a fat lady with a sharp elbow was poking me in the ribs. She seemed to know everyone in the world. With her lorgnette she scanned her programme, making copious notes with a stubby pencil; at the same time commenting in a loud voice on whatever happened. Addressing an officer of high rank next to her, presumably her husband, she remarked, "The obstacles are not stiff enough—they are no test at all; Raoul has a bad horse; Henry de Royer did better yesterday; Toulouse-Lautrec is jumping too high."

I felt like saying to her: Madame, shut your mug, for Heaven's sake, shut your mug.

Papa had arranged to meet us there, and take me later behind the scenes to see the horses. He found us at last, and carried me off for the afternoon.

"Don't wait, Miss Hayes," he said, removing his hat with a deep bow.

The only topic of conversation around us was of horses, of how they had performed, of what mistakes they had made in the ring, and of the ribbons they had earned. I met a great number of papa's friends—the men in pink, the women in smart habits. Among others was a tall young fellow of distinguished appear-

ance, who had some splendid horses he was exhibiting with much *brio*.

"He is an ex-Jew," murmured the spectator next to me, a little whippersnapper, jealous of the success of the elegant gentleman.

The ex-Jew pleased me a lot, anyway. He looked like Alfonso of Spain. Papa was acquainted with him and introduced us as he was passing; but, alas, he appeared interested only in a woman who laughed all the time, showing her teeth and blinking constantly so as to display her long silky lashes. I took to watching this handsome fellow, fascinated by the ardour of his hazel-brown eyes, by his chest thrust forward in passionate tension toward that tall, thin woman with her annoying and immodest expression, lighted by strange libertine thoughts. It seemed that I was observing something beyond my comprehension.

Behind me somebody spoke. "Have you seen Bamberger? He certainly has got that mannequin under his skin."

When we left the Grand Palais, papa took my arm to help me through the lines of carriages, as we looked for our car. Following his habit he murmured the formula he always employed when crossing a street. "Let's keep together; it will cost them more to run over two persons."

During the Easter holidays I accepted an invitation to the home of a Mexican girl who was also at the Ascension, though somewhat older than I. It was puzzling to know why she had been so kind as to ask me. Miss Hayes accompanied me, but having failed to put on her royal-blue dress, perhaps for fear of wearing it out too quickly, she began regretting the fact as soon as we had entered the house. In the hall we discovered ourselves beneath a flood of brilliant electric lights, disclosing a marble staircase hedged on both sides by an impressive multitude of lackeys in knee breeches and powdered hair.

"I had better go back and change my dress," mumbled my Englishwoman in distress.

"*Zut*, for that! You are all right the way you are," I assured her—afraid of missing an instant of a party that promised to be first-class. Furthermore, I had myself put on a new dress of muslin that afternoon which, though in my opinion overdecorated with purple velvet ribbons, was still quite suitable.

On the second floor a real orchestra was playing for a crowd of young people dancing in the drawing-room. Youths with enchanting accents rushed up to me to be introduced. One could hardly imagine that this was not a grown-up affair.

When my first partner at the end of a one-step remarked, "For a French girl you have a wonderful figure, and you danced without stepping on my feet," this filled me at once with my own importance. "I suppose you don't drink champagne?" he asked doubtfully.

"Of course I do," and I looked round hastily to see if the vigilant Miss Hayes were too much in evidence. When I had taken two swallows, I admitted, "Champagne tickles my nose. After all, I would prefer some iced coffee, if you please."

"I thought you would," my young friend laughed.

"Where do you go to school?" I asked. "At the Jesuits?"

"Rather not. I am at Eton, in England, you know."

Eton—the finest school in the world, as Miss Hayes had so often assured me. When I told her all this on our way home, she was greatly interested. "Really, he is at Eton? Those Mexicans get everywhere," she admitted grudgingly. "But does he actually drink champagne?"

"Like mother's milk, Miss Hayes, like mother's milk."

"How shocking!"

Papa had no sooner returned from England than he gave a dinner in honour of a couple he had met in London, with whom he appeared to be already on terms of the warmest friendship. For the party he issued the strictest orders to Miss Hayes regarding my appearance. "She should wear the pale pink dress, that suits her so well. Be sure her hair is properly arranged, and curl the fringe on her forehead, but not too much." Father seemed very anxious I should look my best for these new acquaintances.

It is quite understandable, I thought, when I saw Monsieur and Madame d'Audenard, on whose account we had to take so much trouble. They were even handsomer to look at than Uncle Georges and Aunt Hélène. They were also much more amusing, I concluded, when I saw the other guests laughing heartily at one of the gentleman's sallies.

Monsieur Laborie, next to whom I was sitting at dinner, told

me about the adventures he had experienced in the Congo, from where he had just returned. He professed that wild beasts were his only passion, particularly the gorillas, concerning which he related several fantastic stories.

My little Simone, I said to myself while listening to him politely, permit me to present to you Tartarin de Tarascon. As he was talking without any sign of stopping, I followed with my eyes the manœuvres of the pretty Madame d'Audenard. There was no doubt she was making an amorous attack on father. He was obviously relishing this, and deluged her with smiles. At the moment when Monsieur Laborie was assuring me earnestly that the leopards of the African jungle were less dangerous than society ladies, I noticed Madame d'Audenard, under the pretext of having an idea in common, take papa's hand in hers and gaze at him with such homicidal lust that I was ready to agree completely with the great hunter's thesis. We were beaten, I conceded, the patron is going to collapse in her arms. It will mean new furniture and decorations, it will upset the house, and disturb all our habits again. Evidently I am going to have a lot of trouble stopping him from marrying when there are so many women prowling around on the lookout for love. Anyway, luckily, this one has a husband, and he watches her closely. In fact Monsieur d'Audenard gave the impression of observing every move of his beautiful wife. I had to admit that she was fascinating with her long slim body, her alabaster skin and her feline expression.

In the midst of dinner the conversation turned to Sir Ronald, whom the Audenards seemed to appreciate greatly, and from him it changed to another English baronet they knew. Monsieur d'Audenard told how this young man on the eve of his wedding to a great heiress gave an unusual farewell party to which were invited his last six mistresses. Monsieur d'Audenard happened to meet one of them and it was from her he got the details of how the affair passed off. It appeared that none of them knew the others before the party, but they all turned out to be good sports, except for a Rumanian lady, who flung open the door and left, screaming in a fury, "To me the English sense of humour is almost as jocular as scrofula."

When the moment had arrived for toasts, the remaining five

got up one after the other to tender the future benedict their good wishes, and also to give some useful hints on how to be happy though married.

One of them advised, "Dear Neville, put a little more warmth into your transports."

Another suggested, "Old boy, avoid trying to satisfy yourself so much, and try to satisfy your wife more."

A third said, "Don't sleep on your back, darling, it makes you snore horribly."

So it went on, and at the end of the evening they all kissed him good-bye for the last time, without rancour. The guests were delighted with the story, but papa pointed out in conclusion that the English are an eccentric race.

Monsieur d'Audenard chimed in to say that papa was right. He seemed to be one of those very conciliatory persons. Whenever father made a remark, Monsieur d'Audenard would exclaim, "My dear friend, that is exactly true!"

At first I thought he could not be serious. After all, papa must sometimes be wrong, but soon I perceived that the gentleman really felt what he said. He finally came out with the flat statement, "Maxence is a wizard!"

Encouraged by all this admiration, papa continued throughout the evening, recounting one anecdote after another.

When I retired to join Miss Hayes in my room, I told her laughing how her compatriot had given that unusual farewell dinner. The idea did not seem to please her at all. She was in fact shocked and distressed by the story.

"Since the reign of Edward VII," she explained, "we have been placed too closely in contact with foreigners. It is a bad influence for England. In the times of our beloved Queen Victoria, everything was so much more dignified."

"You mean to say that it is we French who are corrupting you?" I answered angrily. "What a stupid idea! You surely don't know anything about England. For twenty-five years you haven't put your little toe in that country."

"In my opinion a Frenchman's meat is an Englishman's poison," she maintained with evident dissatisfaction.

Uncle Louis brought with him for lunch one day a friend of

his who was in the picture business. It was quite against the rules of our household, where anything to do with trade or art was barred. "Louis, if you do such things you will lead me astray," said father, chaffing. In the back of his mind he considered himself to be of a race superior to the whole artistic world. Though he always appeared cordial, he could not be rid of this hierarchic pretension.

"It is splendid for you to meet people who are able to discuss painting, my old Maxence. After all, are you not a distinguished expert? You go to every exhibition in Paris," Louis smiled.

During the meal this dealer, who was an intelligent Jew, did not have the same ideas as papa. As a result they were soon engaged in an endless discussion that diverted Louis. "Here, you must not murder one another!" he exclaimed at intervals.

"My dear sir, what I can understand as regards the moderns ends with Monet," father was saying. "Picasso in his blue period pleases me all right, but the tragedy is that he has now turned to a vulgar sensationalism. He is trying to stupefy the common people with a fake sophistication. As for the cubists, frankly they are too much for me. They are simply laughing up their sleeves. In the same sack you can put Matisse and all the other madmen of the century. Those iconoclasts will never, no, never, attain enduring fame, my dear sir."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur d'Entremont. Alas, like many people in society, you have not sufficient imagination," this dealer in impressionist art maintained. Amused and upset at the same time, he went on, "If you do not have imagination you cannot march ahead with art, whatever it may be. Beware of an opinion that cannot be renovated; it brings sterility, I assure you."

As is the frequent result of such discussions, nobody was convinced of anything except that the other was an ass.

Since the last time when Nicole came to call on papa, she no longer bowed to him. It worried him greatly. "She is the first woman from whom I have separated with bad feelings," he complained.

"She is the first idiot who wished to make an honest marriage of it," one of his friends replied.

In May that year the Duc d'Orléans honoured father with an invitation to come for a visit in his palace at Palermo. Greatly flattered at the thought of being a guest of his king, he left on the appointed date for Sicily.

"You will find it terribly hot at Palermo," Louis warned.

"I like travelling," he replied, but he failed to add that he loved royal princes more. Twenty-five days later he returned, delighted with everything—especially getting home again. As souvenirs of Italy he brought me back some boxes of sandalwood. They smelled fearfully, but as they were royal presents, I did not dare throw them away. His sojourn with the prince had been interesting, but monotonous. The other guests were all the kind of people who could never see the light side of life. They had worn him out eventually.

"Papa, how do princes live?" I asked at once, expecting descriptions like the court of Louis XIV.

"Princes live like ordinary people, my little girl."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes, like the bourgeois, but with protocol. I must confess, however, that one of them who was particularly observant of etiquette called his wife a 'fat beast', and this gratified me. Another refused to admit that plain mortals should speak to him, except in the third person. Then there was an arrogant German as tedious as a rainstorm. He spent his time putting on airs as pretender to the throne of Bavaria. The fact is that all these people bore my prince. That is why he invited me, as a court jester, to bring him a little merriment, the poor man."

Uncle Louis and Monsieur de Sâblon had arrived to welcome him back, and father went on to tell how one of the main distractions was to play at charades, a kind of entertainment he imagined had died with the Second Empire, and he hoped that it would disappear at once in any case, as he considered that from every point of view it was the saddest possible way to seek amusement. "When you are with princes you lose contact with the world. You never know what to say because you can never change the subject on account of etiquette," he explained, almost in revolt.

"I prefer staying with friends in England," papa continued. "The royal princes live in worse conditions than I do. They are

more or less forbidden everything because of the conventions. The life of a private well-to-do Englishman, *that* is the really royal life. If I did not have the honour of being French, I should wish to be English. England is a charming country—it looks like a park. If you have friends there, the hospitality is boundless, of course. It would weary you, I fear, if I were to describe the unique way of life that those wise people enjoy; but they have found out how to combine comradeship and humanity with the ultimate in comfort, in sport, in good taste, and elegance. I might add that their cellars are the finest in the world, and their wines they serve can be equalled nowhere—except perhaps in Poland.”

“The mothers of all of them are either Jewesses or Americans,” Louis suddenly interrupted. Father’s panegyrics on England always had the effect of making him bristle.

“What does that matter?” father replied, having become very international-minded in recent years.

“It means that they can live much better than you or I, since according to you we exist like rats. But, thank God, we have good pure French blood, without contamination.”

“If that is what gives us a pretty leg, it surely gives us a pretty leg,” father sneered. “I should be delighted to have an American mother. I should have a fresher blood, and I might be more intelligent. Nothing is better for the blood of a race than to have it thoroughly mixed. Not only that, but I should be a millionaire. All Americans are millionaires.”

“How easily you allow yourself to be impressed by foreigners, my poor Maxence,” said Uncle Louis, becoming more and more annoyed with everything that was not absolutely French.

“The funny thing about it is,” continued father, now so carried away by his subject that nobody could stop him, “that England is exactly the country for you.”

“The country for me? Now you are off the rails.”

“Not at all—though they have a king, the English are wholly democratic in a manner that would suit you perfectly. The people live better there than anywhere else, and they are happier. Class hatred does not exist as in France. Socialism has not landed in the hands of a group of idealists or scamps. On the contrary, it is pursued by honest citizens who work for the

welfare of the nation, and not for their own pocketbooks or the glory of the party. England has the intelligence to be united within itself—like Germany for that matter. France is too individualistic and opportunistic; her future will be tragic, mark my words, if things continue so.”

“You are right on some points,” said Louis sadly, “but just the same you are the devil of an Anglophile.”

“My poor man,” replied papa; you are like so many Frenchmen who are too strongly French. Please believe that I quite understand your attitude. I adore my country and would not change my nationality for all the gold in the world, but in my travels I have learned much. There is no use blinking at facts. The unfortunate part of it is that different races do not know one another better. For instance, foreigners often think we are avaricious; well, there is actually no race less sordid than ours.”

“I agree with you,” said Louis.

“We are criticized too severely abroad,” papa went on, “but we will not accept criticism without getting angry. That is really a bad failing, believe me. The English look at it with a broader view. I truly think they enjoy criticism. They certainly like to hear both sides of a question.”

“I think that if Maxence swallows the English so easily, they must also swallow him completely,” put in Monsieur Sâblon, who was beginning to yawn at this discussion.

“No one is a prophet in his own country,” smiled Louis.

I heard papa swearing violently over the telephone. Surely the operator was not answering, I thought philosophically. “‘Allo, ’allo, get my number for me Mademoiselle Mado,” father was shouting like a deaf man.

Mademoiselle Mado was our accredited telephone girl. She knew the life of my father and the first names of all the friends of our house. When I had nothing else to do, I would take off the receiver and chat. I never saw her in my life, but she was one of my intimate friends.

One day she confided to me that papa lived the life of a Casanova. “For years he has been on my line and he has had more mistresses than almost any of my clients; not only that, but he can deceive them all without their knowing it.”

"You are quite right," I replied, without conviction, feeling horrified. I did not like father to be judged in that way, since I admired and respected him wholeheartedly. In my opinion members of the family had the right to do whatever they wished without being subject to criticism. This telephone girl was, however, a power to be appeased and I did not dare put her in her place. Papa, for his part, considered her highly, and sent her *marrons glacés* as well as three hundred francs each January for a New Year present.

"'Allo, Louis," he called on this occasion, when he had finally got the connection. "Listen, old man, will you run over to Jouvancel's house in the rue du Cirque for me? The idiot does not answer his phone. Darrieux has just left me; he wanted to drag me off as a witness. It seems that Jouvancel and Madame Darrieux are in bed together. I refused, of course. If he finds you at the front door, it will not matter, because he does not know you. Go into the entrance hall, jump through the window on the right which gives into the back yard, and knock on the round window of his bathroom. Do you understand what to do? . . . Well, hurry up, run quickly—you will have time perhaps to save their skins."

Two hours later, Louis appeared at the house. "What a fine job you gave me, Maxence!" he exclaimed, mopping his brow. "I got there too late; but the joke is that it was not Darrieux's wife at all, it was Darrieux's pretty mistress, Lily!"

"The pretty Lily?" father cried. "You are killing me! You are killing me!"

Father was full of good intentions and declared seriously to his friends: "Next winter I shall devote myself entirely to my daughter. I will invite tedious and important people to dinner. I must begin to think about her *début*. It is scarcely two years away. 'It makes me tremble already, just to think of those balls they give for the young, where there is always that fearful goatish smell, and at which I shall play the part of wallflower in company with fat old dowagers. I suppose I shall join with them in dreaming how best to marry off my progeny. What a job it is to be father of a family! Hell and damnation, I hate the idea."

"I will give her a dowry so as to help you, old man," said

Louis, trying to comfort him. "She will also be my heir."

"What?" I asked; "you are going to make me your heir—how awful! I don't want to be anyone's heir. Life without my three men and Miss Hayes would be impossible," I said in alarm.

"We don't want to die either, my little bird, but after all it is quite natural that you should inherit from us," interjected Uncle Louis.

"It is an awful thought," I decided with a shiver. "Let's not talk about it any more."

Uncle Sosthène had just returned from Egypt and Aunt Adèle from Switzerland. Cathy was doing better. I wrote to her twice a month and also to my brother. Papa was running in every direction. He was always in a hurry between engagements and always afraid of being a minute late.

"That is the way things are in June," he said. "If I were a bachelor I should get rid of my cook. I have not eaten at home for six months." He was exaggerating a little, though in fact he had numberless invitations.

One Sunday he took me to lunch at "29". It was a family party with some elderly cousins, the "ambassador" and the "general", as they were called. One of them was secretary to an embassy, and the other a captain of cavalry. They were accompanied by their wives, two social-minded women of that pretentious and bantering variety which never stops wagging its tongue like a bell clapper. Just before we sat down another strange-looking gentleman arrived, the Count Dillet. His name seemed familiar, but I could not quite place in what connection. At table conversation turned to the possibility of war.

"It is ridiculous," father interrupted. "The Germans are already masters of the world's markets. They don't need a war and nobody else wants one."

"You are wrong," contradicted Uncle Sosthène. "You do not know them. They are atavistically warlike, and this hebetude overpowers all ideas of prudence, either diplomatic or commercial. Those theories one hears about agreements between peoples are simply practical jokes. Idealists like Jaurès ought to be in strait jackets."

"I am sure you are right," said father, quickly taking his brother's side. "If you wish peace, prepare for war."

Monsieur Dillet, to whom this conversation seemed extremely exasperating, suddenly got up from the table with a knife in his hand. Nobody stirred except the butler who approached and gently removed the knife. He was only just in time as the gentleman began spinning round in a circle and finally fell exhausted into the arms of the servants, who still remained quite imperturbable. With eyes starting from my head, I was looking from one face to another. My appetite had gone, but fortunately there was no insistence that I should eat dessert. The fact was that the desire for food seemed to have left the table, though the conversation continued as if nothing astonishing had taken place.

"Biquette," papa asked when we had left the house, "did Monsieur Dillet frighten you much? His is a rare complaint. There is a strain in his family, which has brought this affliction on them for generations. They call it 'the staggers', and it is really a disease of domestic animals. His wife left the poor man on that account. He used to be desperately in love with your mother, but she was terrified of him, though he is usually completely normal and only has these fits at rare intervals."

So that was how I knew the name! I remembered now having heard mother give orders to Adrien not to leave the drawing-room for an instant if Count Dillet called. "I am afraid he might assassinate me," she explained to the butler.

"Tell me, papa," I asked, after reflecting on this, "they seem to live surrounded by lunatics at '29'; why is that?"

But father was feeling no longer expansive. "Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies," he replied rather gruffly. As a matter of fact this was an unusual state of affairs. Generally he liked to talk about everything that came into his head, and I believe that one of the closest bonds between us was the feeling he had of confidence in my discretion—no matter how often he may have been disillusioned on that score. Thus it happened that I was able to clear up a problem which had been worrying me for a long time. Miss Hayes had been reading me *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and in fact had found this to be the only way to induce me to take any interest in the English language. The tales had stirred in me the desire to be a great detective, but I found myself baffled at the outset by

what I called "The mystery of the aged Madame Gouy."

On returning home after the lunch party, I discovered the large tapestry in the drawing-room had disappeared. Inquiries of the servants brought no information of value. I felt that Sherlock Holmes would perhaps handle such a trivial affair by direct action.

"What's happened to the tapestry, papa?"

"I sold it to Madame Gouy," he replied, somewhat embarrassed.

"You sold it to Madame Gouy?" So that was the story! I flattered myself that the mystery was solved, but for the benefit of my future public I must get the reasons for this strange transaction. "Well, I understand now what you and Uncle Louis were cooking up that evening with her; but why are you selling our things? Are we ruined?" I asked anxiously.

"No, but she offered a fabulous price. She absolutely had to have it for a New York millionaire. She never makes a mistake about antiques," he added admiringly.

"Have you known her long?"

"Since always. She was a friend of my mother's. Her husband lost all their money thirty years ago, but she managed to save them by selling the antiques she discovers in the houses of her acquaintances."

"I don't like that friend of your mother's," I replied disapprovingly. "Please don't sell any more of our things, I beg you. I am fond of everything we own. You have enough money, anyway, because Uncle Sosthène pays all your debts."

"You must listen to Biquette," Louis advised. "I would not sell my Henry III chest at Lauffleur, though, Heaven knows, Mère Gouy offered me a splendid price," he ended with a slight tone of regret.

"Above everything, old man," I overheard father remark, "don't let the little one know that I also sold the portrait by Boldini. She would abuse me again; it might even make her ill."

"It is not my fault, Maxence, if you made an error like that. I tried every way to stop you. Well, I won't say anything," he assured him good-naturedly.

But I disliked the portrait as much as father and let the matter pass.

From Brittany Françoise wrote:

La Breneraie

June 9, 1914.

My *choute*:

How far I am from you, hiding away in this old castle in Brittany constructed so long ago that it is falling everywhere into decay. In this country nothing is modern, nothing is up-to-date. Even the postman is slow on his rounds.

When I got here I said: *Zut!* To be happy I must be in Paris or the civilized provinces. Then little by little people and things seemed less sad—almost affecting. My grandparents, whom I had quite forgotten, are real Bretons of Brittany. To begin with we had nothing to say between us. Now we are inseparable. They were waiting for me at the station. He was dressed in a corduroy jacket, green with age, on his head was an old felt hat, and he had *sabots* on his feet! She was wearing a lace cap of the country and a black dress adorned with velvet panels. You can see what it was like, I'm sure. I could not get over the simple rusticity of their demeanour. Marguerite was horrified, and murmured behind my back, "Madame your mother warned that we should never come here."

I was thinking she was probably right. And now I cannot leave the place. Will you be able to understand, Biquette, you who were crying this autumn at leaving Laufluer? In the artificial atmosphere of mother's house, among people who cover up their thoughts, put paint over their ugliness, and lie so as to speak, I never felt happy. Here everything is real. The people belong to the soil, they look like the soil, they have the same earthy simplicity.

The property is magnificent. Grandfather walks over it all day long. I follow him everywhere in the fields or through the high forests of chestnuts. As we go he tells me of his father whose parents escaped to England during the Revolution. He returned here as an immigrant and retired from the world.

The other day, standing on the top of a slope, he said: "Here is the kingdom of your ancestors. Can you smell the perfume of our old trees and the smoke of the charcoal

burners? When the wind blows through the woods and whistles along the valley up into the hills, it is fine music, don't you think? Your poor father could not understand all that. He was a prodigal son, if ever there was one. You cannot imagine what it was like for us to grow old by ourselves; but now the good Lord has sent you, the last of our race. Perhaps you will grow fond of this old Breton property."

And that is how it is, Biquette, but don't worry, because I will surely see you again this summer at Laufleur. Write me often, and tell me what you are doing. Let me say, before I finish this letter, how much I miss you and how often I am thinking of you.

With all my love from the bottom of my heart.

Your devoted
Fanchon.

P.S. Nantes is a marvellous town.

"'Fanchon!'" I smiled. "Now she is getting more Breton than the Bretons. I wonder why she thinks Nantes attractive."

On the day of the Drags, so as to see papa pass by in the coach of Madame de Saint-Leger, Miss Hayes and I took our places early along the sidewalk of the Avenue du Bois. We secured some iron chairs—that were not too comfortable, I must confess—amid a multitude of Parisians who were known as "The devoted and ever-present members of the Stony-Broke Club." Like us they were waiting to witness the passage of these last survivors of the equipages.

It was a remarkable sight, those yellow, red, and black coaches, on which sat gentlemen elegantly turned out and wearing the fashionable grey top hat prescribed for such occasions. Beside them their ladies in silk dresses disputed with the breeze for the possession of their miraculous and complicated head-gears. The crowd murmured in admiration "How lovely they are, those beauties." From time to time thin notes emerged from long brass coach horns, as near as could be got, I suppose, to the last trump. The brass horns sang among the flowering chestnut trees. Without our knowing it they were sounding the ultimate fanfare for that kind of luxurious and happy life.

"Ah, there is father!" I exclaimed.

At which a fat charwoman turned to look at me with admiration and said, "Your father? You are one of the high and mighty, then?"

I must say father looked imposing in an impeccable cutaway. He was badly crowded on the hard narrow seat to which he clung with stiff dignity, gloved in yellow kid, his grey topper slightly cocked, a flower in his buttonhole; everything contributed to his magnificent and precarious situation. He ignored the gawking of the populace and spoke assiduously to an immense lady who was at least a head taller than he and twice as broad. I deduced she must be extremely important from the mass of plumage in her hat, the ropes of pearls on her ample bosom, and the extreme amiability father vouchsafed her.

When we got home, in reply to all my questions, papa explained, "It was Madame du Boys, to whom I paid such extravagant attention, as you may have noticed all for your sake, Biquette, darling. You see her daughter is just your age, and now the old gal will ask you for the *début*. We must not forget to put Madame du Boys on the list for my big dinners next year. When I think what my parties will be like with a bundle of old sticks like her, I begin to fear for my reputation as a man of discernment in judging women." Papa groaned at the thought, but a moment later his good spirits revived. It was rare, indeed, for him to remain depressed for more than five minutes on end. With a smile he asked if I had heard the sarcastic remark currently going round Paris apropos the pretentious way the good lady spelled and pronounced her name (though it should really be written "Dubois" and should rhyme with *petits pois*). They were saying: "*Madame du Boys, voulez-vous-des petits poys?*"

"Yes, old fellow," father went on, addressing Louis. "I am sliding off to Marienbad immediately after the *Grand Prix*. The little one and her Englishwoman are leaving for Biarritz in ten days. By the way, be sure to have your carpets well sprinkled with camphor, pepper, and naphthaline, and put the covers on your furniture."

"What? Covers on his furniture? Papa, you cannot exist without covers; for two weeks already our apartment has been

unlivable. Don't you remember how mother cried out on the subject, and called you an 'old bourgeois moth-hunter'?"

"I am not so bourgeois really. The trunks of all Russian princes smell of camphor from the first of January to Saint Glinglin's day."

On the telephone papa was shouting, "Au revoir, Sâblon, I am off for my cure. . . . How did you hear that I am keen on her? . . . You know everything. Yes, she is an adorable girl, of course—unfortunately she is married. Between you and me, I think she is very fond of her husband. . . . Yes, he is a charming man, that Audenard, I quite agree. I shall be meeting them at Biarritz the end of August. Do come there too. Why, for the Lord's sake, why must you always go round with women of doubtful reputation? Take a leaf out of my book and try the possibilities of pretty girls who are genuine ladies. They are so much more agreeable from all points of view. . . . Well, good-bye, Bertrand, write me during the summer.—What a good friend he is!" papa concluded as he hung up the receiver with a delighted smile.

After many letters and telegrams Françoise made up her mind at last to come and join me. I had harassed my father with much snivelling and supplication on the subject. "Biarritz is a country at the end of the world. If I went there alone with Miss Hayes, I should die of boredom. Please let me invite my pal to come with me."

"Arrange it as you wish," father acquiesced at last, since he understood friendship. "I will pay for her on condition that you do not go in for extravagances."

Madame de Granville was sympathetic to the idea on account of the small gifts of flowers I brought her from time to time, and persuaded Nicole that it would be an excellent thing if Françoise accompanied me. "In any case," she explained, "it is a unique method to get her away from the heaths of Brittany."

I waited nervously at the station to meet her, surrounded by Madame du Ruffet, the old aunt, and my Englishwoman. I saw her first and ran toward her. Kissing me effusively, she exclaimed, "Biquette, my little chickabiddy, I am glad to see you. . . . How are you maman?" she said without enthusiasm;

"hullo, auntie; good afternoon, Miss Hayes," and she offered kisses to them all. In that short glimpse I saw that Françoise had changed, though in what manner I could not discover.

"Now, what is going to happen?" she asked when we arrived at her aunt's house. Madame de Granville explained what everyone knew: that on the doctor's orders I must go to Biarritz for two months; and that Monsieur d'Entremont had kindly suggested Françoise should accompany me.

"It will be very amusing," I assured her ecstatically.

"Biquette," she admitted to me later, "if it were not for you, and particularly because you are ill, I would have stayed in Brittany. Once a month I used to go to Nantes with Marguerite for shopping. Pretending that he had some business in connection with coal, Gabriel de Loches came there to meet me, and we spent the day together in a hotel."

"Your grandparents found out nothing?" I asked in astonishment.

"No, they neither saw nor heard a thing; it is completely covered up," she smiled. "Luckily we came across no acquaintances in Nantes."

"What about his wife?"

"Oh, his wife! He satisfied her with nebulous explanations. The poor man is tired to death of her—she makes him feel like Sinbad the Sailor with the Old Man of the Sea round his neck." Then, as some sort of excuse, she concluded, "This whole affair is really like a banana peel on which I slipped."

"What? A banana peel?" I exclaimed, appalled at the comparison.

Without seeming to notice my consternation, she warned, "As always, keep this to yourself, Biquette."

"Don't worry, *ma vieille*." But I thought privately, Let's hope there will be no "coal business" at Biarritz. Miss Hayes sniffs about very cleverly, without appearing to do so. It would make a pretty scandal if she discovered the matter.

On our arrival we got rooms at an imposing hotel, an antique enterprise going back to the days of Empress Eugénie—"without improvements since then," my governess declared. She considered the place out-of-date. Thanks to the overwhelm-

ing heat, she decided we should bathe at the Port Vieux, a small beach that was safer than the large bay where most people swam, and many drowned according to her information. We hastened shortly to the Port Vieux after purchasing swimming suits of knitted black jersey, on the advice of Françoise.

"They will be too revealing," my governess complained; "you should have bought the model with knickers and the frills on the edges; they are so much prettier."

"Really, Miss Hayes, you are far behind the times," said Françoise scornfully. "You can do what you wish, but I'm not going to swim in a tunic of 1900 design."

"Nor I, at any price," I chimed in quickly. "As you can see, all the young girls wear knitted suits now."

Miss Hayes gave up the fight, against her judgment. It distressed her to see the children of good families go into the water so barely clad. "These times are unbelievable," she moaned. "Decency has departed, we are in the midst of a moral crisis. In the days of Queen Victoria . . ."

"Oh, Miss Hayes!" I cried out, and stopped my ears.

On the second occasion that we went in the ocean, Françoise and I became brave and adventured quite far from shore while my governess, frightened by the foaming waves, watched us with anxious eyes.

After a while a long thin young man came to lean against the rope to which we were clinging. "Do you know how to swim?" he asked. As I did not reply, he added insolently, "Are you deaf and dumb, Mademoiselle?"

Indignantly I replied, "Monsieur, we do not know you."

"We do not know you," Françoise added, looking him over severely, with her nose in the air.

Miss Hayes on the beach, with her feet almost in the water, was loosing piercing shrieks which I tried to abate, waving my hand at her.

"We are coming out right away," Françoise called.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the young man continued, without appearing the least bit disconcerted. "I am Carlos Pidal; my father is Count de Santa Fernandez. I could teach you to swim, if you liked."

"Thanks very much, but we don't want to learn," said Françoise, much less disagreeably.

Miss Hayes was by now giving vent to screams that were more awful than ever, and was trying by every means to get us out of the water. "Your duenna does not seem to approve our conversation," he said.

In spite of myself I asked him, "Duenna? What do you mean by 'duenna'?"

"It is the mournful shadow of a young girl, who is just unfolding into a flower," he replied poetically.

"Then you are speaking about Miss Hayes," said Françoise, delighted by the metaphor.

All the way back our "shadow" lectured us on the subject of Spaniards. According to her they had the reputation of being more dangerous than rattlesnakes. At the hotel she lamented grievously that we mixed with impossible people, simply because I sat down next to a charming little Russian baroness. She seemed happy to be alive and was continually humming to herself.

"She adores cakes and has offered me some wonderful *petits fours* after dinner," I disclosed. "Furthermore, she is not at all impossible. She never says naughty words, but there is one thing I don't know how to explain altogether. I cannot make out why her bedroom balcony connects with that of the American gentleman next door to us. She has breakfast in a *négligée* with him there every morning."

"That is exactly what is wrong," said Miss Hayes, almost purple in the face.

Our hotel was located on an avenue along which passed the tramline leading to Bayonne. The broken-winded puffing of the locomotive woke us at six each day, and drove us frantic with the noise. Miss Hayes asked politely to have our rooms changed to others on the court. The manager, however, an impertinent little man, was not much impressed by her good-natured appearance, and put her off without satisfaction. There were no more rooms on the court, he assured her. Leaning against the reception desk we heard his stilted, conceited voice refuse us with scant ceremony. Suddenly the mustard reached my nose. I began to abuse him violently, to the stupefaction of Miss Hayes and Françoise.

"You can take it or leave it," I cried in a fury and struck the desk, bang! a heavy blow with my fist. "If you do not give us other rooms between now and tomorrow, we will go elsewhere. That is all there is to it!"

"I will do everything in my power," said the manager, bowing double. "Mademoiselle d'Entremont must understand . . ."

"I don't choose to understand. I am not interested in your explanations; you give us other rooms or we leave. Come, Miss Hayes," I concluded with all the self-possession and dignity of an offended queen.

From then on whenever there was any trouble Miss Hayes always remarked with a malicious smile, "I will talk about it with Mademoiselle d'Entremont; she will arrange the matter with you."

"I fear that this is a bad habit I am letting you acquire," she said to me; "but with the French it is necessary to shout to be respected, and I must confess that you know how to be abusive like no one in the world. It seems to me that you even enjoy it. I have only one request: please don't use the expression '*je m'en fous*', it is really shocking."

To tell the truth, it was not so necessary to shout, but simply to know how to impose one's will, an art of which the poor woman, owing to her good manners, had no knowledge whatever. She always gave the impression of asking a favour which in fact was no favour at all.

The next day the manager assigned us three new rooms on a court shaded with tamarisks, and at a cheaper rate besides. Evidently it was the question of price which had proved the delicate feature of the affair.

In spite of the counsels of my governess, we became less and less savage with young Carlos. He seemed to know an incalculable number of other Spaniards with splendid titles, and between them their persistence did not allow Miss Hayes an instant of relaxation. In reply to her vehement reproaches, we explained innocently that we did not know the gentlemen. They were just bathers, like ourselves.

If we met them in the street, we were instructed to turn our heads the other way and not reply to their bows, but at the beach they protested, "Your duenna is untamable."

We replied despairingly that if we knew their parents it would be entirely different.

"Our parents are far away in Madrid, in Catalonia, in London."

"They are too distant, we fear, to help in this emergency."

When we had bathed ten glorious days in the sea, Miss Hayes decided that we must take a rest for a week. There was no longer a chance to talk with the Spanish boys.

One evening about nine o'clock the thrumming of a guitar beneath our windows broke the stillness of the discrete courtyard. Thinking that it was a beggar minstrel, I took some pennies from my purse and leaned out of the window to throw them to him. Suddenly I discovered myself nose to nose with Carlos and a friend. "*Zut, alors!*" I cried in astonishment.

"What did you say?" Miss Hayes inquired.

"Nothing, I threw my pennies out carelessly, but it is all right, he has found them now," I hastened to add so as to allay her interest. In an unconcerned manner I strolled over to the room of Françoise, and in a few words told her the news. We immediately went out on her balcony to take a look, and saw with horror that our duenna had become decidedly Spanish, and with a theatrical gesture was emptying a large pitcher of water on the heads of our admirers.

It was a pretty scandalous business. "Now, Miss Hayes, you have made us look like madwomen," we moaned.

The subject arose between Françoise and me of how we would ever be able to mend the breach with these grandees of Spain. In our quandary we deliberated secretly with the Russian baroness, and she offered very kindly to convey our mortification to the gentlemen. We asked her, in spite of the objections of my governess, to tea at Miremont's—the pastry-cook shop where everyone went who was somebody—so as to point out the young men to her. Through an unhopd-for coincidence, we passed them in front of the Royal Tea, a bar where the smart people did not confine themselves to the decoctions of China and Ceylon. It turned out to be a unique afternoon, as Françoise, pretending that she had to buy a hat, fled with the sporting baroness to the post office in the hope of finding a letter from Gabriel. There were no less than three.

After tea Miss Hayes suggested we should take a drive in a cab to the Rock of the Virgin. The baroness departed, explaining that she had an engagement, and went to join the Spaniards whom she seemed anxious to know. From then on, to our great surprise, she never spoke to us again, and in fact she disappeared from our lives, since she went to another hotel the day after meeting them. Sometimes we used to see her driving in a cab accompanied by Carlos, or sitting among several of the Spaniards at the Royal Tea. She bowed to us somewhat vaguely and in a slightly protective manner, while our former friends looked off into space with bored expressions.

"I am flabbergasted," said Françoise in astonishment. "Well, it makes no difference as far as our designs on that wretched Carlos are concerned. Young men are always so stupid; they know nothing about life."

"How right you are," I agreed, with blasé conviction.

Gabriel's very tender letters left Françoise in a pensive mood. "Can you tell me where this is going to lead you?" I asked. It was my fifteenth birthday; I was a grown-up woman, and no longer to be denied information on the grounds of youth.

"*Quién sabe*, Biquette, *quién sabe*? Many happy returns, my *choute*, by the way; and don't worry," she added, kissing me.

I was intending to continue the discussion and was about to try and combat this romance, of which I strongly disapproved, when Miss Hayes appeared, her face white and dismayed. "There is terrible news, my children, we are going to have a war. The first mobilization has been decreed."

"A war, you are mad! Why a war? And who with?"

"With Germany."

"Germany?"

"I have come to fetch you; let's go downstairs."

Tumbling down the few steps leading to the hall, we discovered a milling group of people. All of them were discussing war and the "Alboches" excitedly. How was it possible? We had never heard predictions of such possibilities. Then, however, I remembered Uncle Sosthène, the international oracle, and his dire forebodings.

It was in the midst of these circumstances that a telegram

arrived from father telling us to return immediately to Paris. He had got back from Austria in great haste and had been so upset that he had failed to include a single loving thought for my anniversary in his message. Everything looked black, there was no doubt. Françoise would not stop crying. She looked as sad as a nightcap, and was fearfully anxious because of Monsieur de Loches. Having no news from him she expected never to see him again. I affirmed confidently that he was too old to go to war; but she would not listen, saying that all the men would be called, up to the age of forty-five, and he was only forty-one.

All through my life I had heard much talk of wars, but they had to do with a nebulous historical world, or with phantoms like Jeanne d'Arc, Louis XIV, Napoleon, and Bismarck. The idea of a new war seemed inconceivable and so impossible that I could not understand why Françoise was crying. "Mobilization is not war," I kept repeating.

It was quite impossible to get berths on the train to Paris. We had to sit on benches in a third-class carriage. They seemed unbelievably hard to our luxury-softened bodies, but they did not prevent us from sleeping like dead men with our heads resting on the lap of Miss Hayes. In her ever-faithful way she served as a pillow the whole length of the trip for "my two darling girls," as she called us lovingly. At the apartment, which had been hurriedly got ready, we found papa, Ballou, and Louis, the three of them already united at short notice. Louis had not gathered sufficient courage to shake the naphthaline out of his furniture, and was sleeping in one of our guest-rooms.

Madame du Ruffet and old Aunt Granville had come back in haste, and called Louis on the phone immediately. After some discussion with papa, he asked them for lunch. The day was the third of August, and the cataclysm had put an end to recent differences; but when they met it was with the sad knowledge that war was already declared.

"I have talked with my brother—Briand informed him that Belgium has been invaded," papa announced.

During the meal Françoise kept looking at Louis, but was thinking of Gabriel; while I was looking at my plate, and won-

dering what the world was coming to, when Miss Hayes remarked timidly that she wished to return to England. She had heard, she went on, that Great Britain would align herself with France. It was the first bombshell, and it was too much for me to bear. I left the table sobbing.

"What an appalling thought! What will become of me?" I cried.

"We will stay together," Françoise promised affectionately and protectingly. "I will take care of Biquette," she reassured the men of my family, who were at their wits' ends. They realized, of course, that they could not ask Miss Hayes to remain, in view of the European situation.

In despair I wailed bitterly: "England will not enter the war; it is only an excuse. Miss Hayes has been seeking for a long time to leave me. She pictures herself queening it in her brother's parsonage and she will accomplish nothing there but grow cabbages."

Later in the smoking-room the family considered for a long time what each was intending to do. Nicole, in her quality as a well-organized person, had already been to the Red Cross. To the admiration of everyone, it was discovered that during the last ten years she had received several diplomas as nurse. "My name is on the list for a hospital near the front," she said, turning slightly pale.

"I am going," Louis announced, smiling gently at Françoise.

"I am enlisting" father declared.

"I also," said Ballou.

Sitting on the floor amid this group of patriots, I dissolved into tears.

"Now what are we going to do with the girls?" said father, in a matter-of-fact voice. "No matter if there is a war, Biquette's bones are in a bad state and she should return to Biarritz."

Up till then Madame de Granville had not opened her mouth, but she volunteered immediately to remain with us until a new governess could be found. Everyone was much relieved at this, including myself. I liked the old lady well enough. She was easy to get along with and quite broad-minded, in spite of the severe family atmosphere from which she sprang. I also knew that she possessed a keen sense of humour. In her youth she

had been famous for her irreproachable virtue, although one of the great beauties of her time. Once I heard her say, "I grew up for twenty years, I blossomed for twenty years, I held on for twenty years, and I hope to fade for twenty years."

As she was leaving, she kissed me, and gave me permission to call her henceforth "Aunt Marie". Thus a new member was added to my already sufficiently numerous family, after the fashion of Brittany, where all the well-born are related.

Françoise, still in tears, by some kind of Indian ruse sent a telegram to the post-office box at Mazières with her new address for Gabriel.

Tata was crying into her sauces; Adrien took courage from the reflection that he was much too old to go to war. These thoughts cheered him up, perhaps, as he was the only one in the house who could attempt to whistle a tune or appear the least bit gay. Alice came to inquire if father expected to keep her on, and it was decided that she should accompany me. Rigobert kept talking all the time about his two sons. Miss Hayes with red eyes packed silently.

My father telephoned continuously to friends who had hastened back to the city. He was upset and anxious about the Audenards. Monsieur de Sâblon arrived from Vichy and reported that he had a fearful time finding a seat in the Paris train. He thought this explained Yvonne d'Audenard's delay in returning from Savoy. "The trains are absolutely jammed; don't worry, my poor Maxence," he said.

"She might have written me, anyway. I should not like to leave without seeing her again. I am mad about her, old man, the first woman I have ever really loved . . . It is just my luck—now that I have found her, I must go bundling off to war."

"Really, Maxence, you know you are too old to enlist," Sâblone remonstrated.

"Too old? Speak for yourself. War is my business. Woman or no woman, I would rather fight for my country than do anything else in the world."

"As for me," Monsieur de Sâblon remarked by way of excuse, "I am twelve years older than you and am really incapable of killing anything—even a flea."

Between him and Adrien, France would be lost, I thought, if she had to rely on them to defend her.

Two days before papa left, Yvonne d'Audenard let him know by *pneumatique* that she had returned from her mother-in-law's. It had been impossible to send him word. "The annoyance of being in love with a married woman is that she really has no liberty," father grumbled as he read the message.

"You would do better to have a hygienic young lady like mine," Louis suggested.

"How horrible! By the way, are you going to keep the girl on?"

"Naturally, she will stay in the little apartment at Les Ternes, and I'll continue to pay her a thousand francs a month. I believe in concubines, you know. One gets all the advantages and none of the annoyances of marriage that way."

"Really, old man, you have always had the knack of amazing me. There is no one more cultured and charming than you, but in some ways you are entirely crude," said father, quite distressed.

"There is one good thing about this war," my uncle went on, noticing me just then, huddled in an armchair. "Our Biquette will not be tripping over our heels all the time, forever on the alert to interfere with the arrangements of three naughty old bachelors."

Wearing his silver helmet with its long horsetail flying in the wind; in a new and immaculate uniform of the heavy dragoons; with white gauntlets on his hands, father spent his last day saying good-bye to former loves. There were so many of them listed on a sheet of paper that he had to make a schedule of how much time to allow each so as not to miss any. Madame d'Audenard, at the bottom of the page, had the honour of receiving his last embraces.

Papa asked me to come to his room with Miss Hayes an hour before he left. We were both crying hot tears. He thanked the old Englishwoman for her long services, and said, displaying much emotion, "You have been more than a friend to us, really you have been a devoted guardian angel, whom I shall never forget. There is no way for me to tell you how sincerely I

thank you and how grateful I am. Please pray for me, Miss Hayes, will you?" and he kissed her hand affectionately.

Then he took me on his knees and talked to me tenderly, while I clung to him sobbing. "Biquette, darling, be brave. I know there is nothing sadder in the world than for us to be separated. We have had the privilege of love in our family, and of having enjoyed an agreeable life together; but now we must have courage. You are a big girl, almost grown-up; you must make up your mind to face whatever may happen. If I am killed, Louis will take care of you and your brother. If he is killed, Ballou will do the same. If he disappears also, Uncle Sosthène will protect you. In any case you will become the head of the family. Don't ever forget to be honest in business matters. Try to be as little egoistic as possible. Be indulgent with people, and kind-hearted. True happiness consists in making others happy. I have not always remained faithfully in the bosom of the Church, I admit. Only those who do not know how to live do not sin, but I have tried to do the least possible harm whenever I could.

"Now," he ended, with a laugh, "I give you my blessing." He kissed me, and I heard the clank of his sabre, the jingle of his spurs as he clattered down the stairs.

I rushed to the balcony. Before getting into the taxi he looked up and waved a white-gloved hand. For a moment he stood there motionless.

"Papa, don't leave me!"

Through the mist of my tears, I could see him no more.

"Good-bye, papa," I cried, "good-bye, papa!"

THE END

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